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MAY 2002 NO. 50

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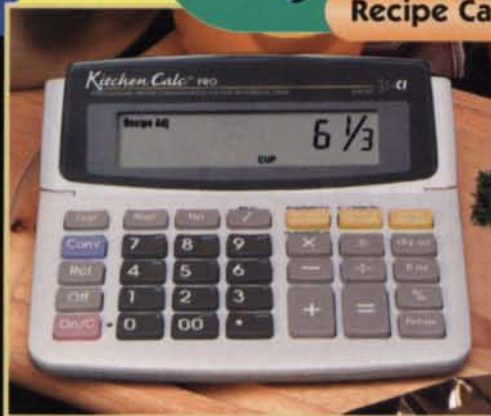


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Cover photo, Scott Phillips. These pages, bottom right, Ben Fink; all others, Scott Phillips.

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Country ham, the old-fashioned way



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Brian Streeter ("Lamb Shoulder," p. 65) is the chef at Cakebread Cellars in Rutherford, California; he last wrote for *Fine Cooking* on cooking with wine (#39). When Brian isn't cooking special-event dinners at Cakebread Cellars, chances are he's teaching. Every year he adopts a class of fifth-graders and teaches them about cuisines of the world and sustainable agriculture through the Chefs Collaborative Adopt-a-School program. A graduate of the New England Culinary Institute, Brian cooked at Domaine Chandon in the Napa Valley before becoming the chef at Cakebread.

Ris Lacoste ("Spring Menu," p. 36) is the award-winning executive chef of 1789 Restaurant in Washington, D.C. After serving for four years as the chairman of the D.C.



chapter of the American Institute of Wine & Food, she's now on the national board. Ris graduated from the University of California at Berkeley, earned her grand diplôme from La

Varenne Cooking School in France, and then joined Bob Kinhead at 21 Federal Restaurant in Nantucket, and then in Washington, D.C., before going to 1789 Restaurant in 1995.

Abigail Johnson Dodge ("Popovers," p. 42), a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*, whizzes up popovers in a trusty mustard-yellow blender that's a remnant of her husband's college days. In addition to writing for *Fine Cooking*, Abby is working on a couple of new books. She recently completed *Dessert*, and she's contributing a chapter to *Savoring America*, due out this fall.

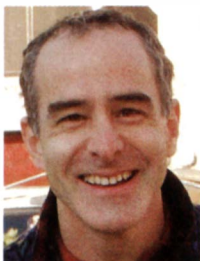
Bruce Weinstein ("Cream Sauce Pastas," p. 45) started his career by studying cooking at Johnson & Wales but then took a twenty-year detour into the Madison Avenue advertising world. He came back to food and began working on *The Ultimate* cookbook series by



William Morrow. His collaborator, **Mark Scarbrough** (above right) is a former college English professor who decided to write instead of teach writing and chose food and travel as his areas of expertise. The pair have published *The Ultimate Shrimp Book* and are now writing *The Ultimate Brownie Book*.



Peter Hoffman ("Cauliflower," p. 50) is the chef-owner of Savoy in New York City. He relies heavily on local producers and ingredients to prepare his Mediterranean-inspired cuisine. His position as the national chair of the Chefs Collaborative and as a member of the advisory board of the New York City Greenmarkets for the last fifteen years bear evidence of this commitment. Before opening Savoy in 1990 with his wife, Susan Rosenfeld, he studied under Madeleine Kamman and in Tuscany and the Languedoc and worked at The Quilted Giraffe, Hubert's, and La Colombe d'Or.



When **Maryellen Driscoll** ("Banoffee," p. 54) got tired of writing about politics, crime, and city budgets for a daily New England newspaper six years ago,

her editor sarcastically asked, "What do you want to do, write about food?" She answered with an emphatic "yes" and went on to do so, working for three and a half years as an editor at *Cook's Illustrated* magazine before setting out as a freelance writer, book editor, and food stylist for national television. A contributing author to *Brilliant Food Tips & Cooking Tricks*, she worked as a consulting researcher and recipe developer for the upcoming cookbook *CookSmart*, by Pam Anderson. Maryellen is now an editor-at-large for *Fine Cooking*. She lives in central New York with her husband on a working farm.

Martha Holmberg ("Tortilla Soup," p. 58) learned to make tortilla soup when she worked at The Mocha Cafe in Denver, Colorado, which is where she began her career in food. She loves having the soup in her repertoire of "easy but interesting" dishes that suit her busy schedule as the editor-in-chief of *Fine Cooking*.

Joyce Goldstein ("Grains," p. 60) is an award-winning chef, a cookbook author, and a cooking teacher with 35 years of experience. She was the chef-owner of Square One in San Francisco for twelve years, during which time she won a James Beard award for best chef in California. Among her eighteen cookbooks, the most recent, *Enoteca: Simple, Delicious Recipes in the Italian Wine Bar Tradition*, was released last summer.

Leslie Reysin ("Bread Puddings" p. 68) writes and teaches about cooking. As the first woman chef at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, Leslie helped break down barriers to women working in New York City restaurant kitchens. She later opened her own bistro, Restaurant Leslie, in Greenwich Village. Her first book, *Great Fish, Quick*, was a finalist for a Julia Child award. Leslie is working on her second book.

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LETTERS

Here's the place to share your thoughts on our recent articles or your food and cooking philosophies. Send your comments to Letters, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by e-mail to fc@taunton.com.



FROM THE EDITOR

One of our favorite articles in this issue is "How to Make Light, Creamy Pasta Sauces" (p. 45), the fourth in our Cooking Without Recipes series. Authors Bruce Weinstein and Mark Scarbrough show how to make these appealing pastas in four simple steps, and give you the choice of making one of their six delectable recipes or creating your own. What's great about these pastas is the amount of cream—enough to create a mellow, unctuous sauce that clings to the pasta, but not so much that you're drowning in it. Their method truly offers "more flavor and less fat," but in an authentic, flavor-first, *Fine Cooking* kind of way.

Why do we publish the Cooking Without Recipes series? To fulfill our mission of making life in the kitchen more fun and successful by bringing you a choice: specific ingredients and amounts for those who prefer cooking from something tried and true, plus a clear explanation of the underlying technique for those adventurous cooks who are ready to develop their own pasta dishes.

Have you been to our web site lately (www.finecooking.com)? You'll find fun and useful how-to videos, like Evan Kleiman showing you how to stretch the pizza dough for her recipes in the last issue, and Master Sommelier Tim Gaiser showing all of us who are not master sommeliers how to easily open a bottle of wine. And don't forget Cooks Talk: post a question, answer someone else's, or just see what everybody's talking about.

And there will be plenty new to talk about next issue, when we launch our new design and lots of new editorial features. The heart and soul of *Fine Cooking*—providing inspiration and how-to for cooks of all levels—is not changing a bit, but we'll be delivering it in a fresh new package with more information on equipment and products and more tips and advice from our test kitchen. We'll also be awarding a great prize for the best reader tip we receive, so be sure to send us your own clever inspiration and how-to (see p. 34).

—Martha Holmberg, editor-in-chief

New foldout came just in time

I love the new Quick & Delicious feature from your latest issue. I was thinking of canceling my subscription since life is getting more hectic and I wasn't

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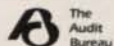
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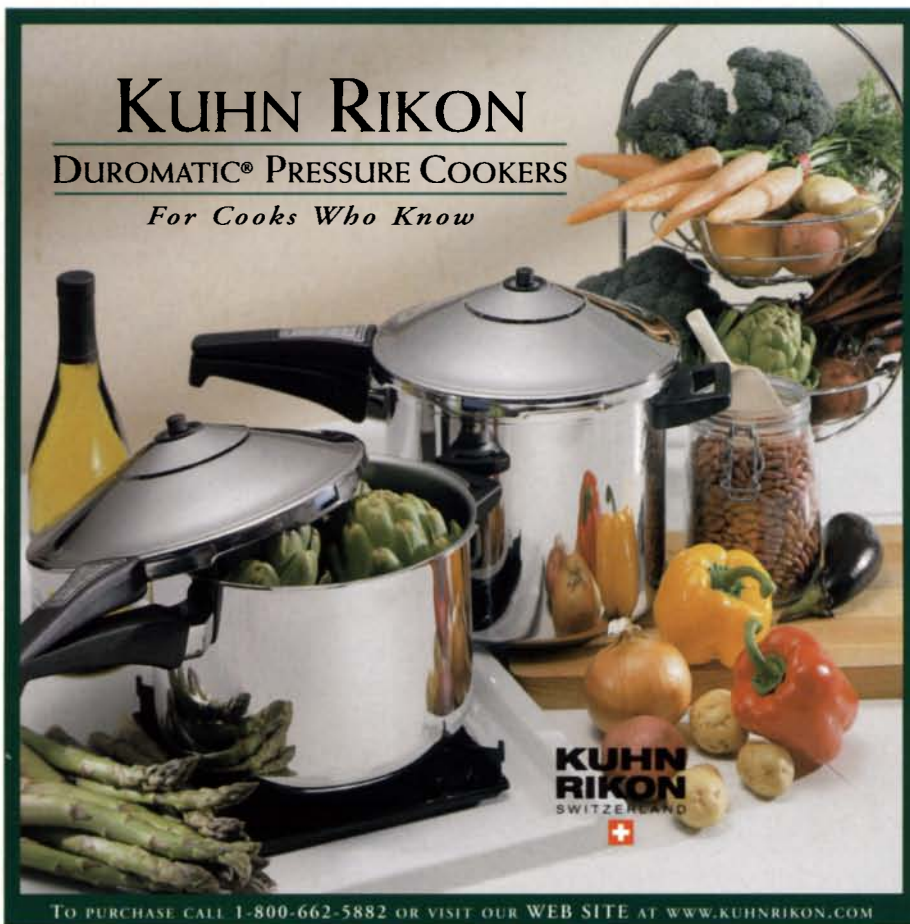
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fine COOKING ...around the country

March 15: The Cook Street School of Fine Cooking in **Denver** presents a cooking class on how to prepare light, creamy pasta sauces, based on an article appearing in this issue of *Fine Cooking*. For details, call 303/308-9300.

March 15, 16, 18: Editor-in-chief Martha Holmberg teaches classes at Central Market Cooking Schools in Texas: at **Ft. Worth** on March 15; at **Plano** on March 16, and at **Houston** on March 18. For information, call 512/206/1067.

March 17: Editor-in-chief Martha Holmberg travels to **Dallas** for a cooking demonstration at the Dallas Wine & Food Festival, while senior editor Amy Albert joins contributing editor Tim Gaiser for a cheese and wine pairing seminar. Other features of the event include wine and food tastings, and book signings by wine and cookbook authors. The festival is held at The Fairmont Hotel in the Dallas Arts District. Details are available at 214/741-6884 or www.dallaswinefestival.com.

April 5, 6: Contributing editor Molly Stevens conducts cooking demonstrations at Central Market Cooking Schools in Texas, in **San Antonio** on April 5 and in **Austin** on April 6. Details are available by calling 512/206-1067.

April 7: Contributing editor Molly Stevens autographs copies of her new book, *One Potato, Two Potato*, at the Texas Hill Country Wine & Food Festival in **Austin**. For further details go to www.texaswineandfood.org.

May 15: Editor-in-chief Martha Holmberg and executive chef Katy Sparks demonstrate a seasonal menu featuring artisanal ingredients at De Gustibus Cooking School at Macy's in **New York City**. For information and reservations, call 212/439-1714.

Mid May: The Cook Street School of Fine Cooking in **Denver** presents a cooking class based on articles in the June/July issue of *Fine Cooking*. For dates and details, call 303/308-9300.

Through May: *Fine Cooking* is a principle sponsor of cooking classes at the De Gustibus Cooking School in **New York City**. Call 212/439-1714 or visit <http://starchefs.com/DeGustibus/> for a class schedule and other information. *Fine Cooking* is also a partner with Ramekins Sonoma Valley Culinary School in **Sonoma, California**. Visit www.ramekins.com or call 707/933-0450 for details and a schedule of classes.

spending as much time looking over the issues as I used to. But this new column was just the ticket to get me interested again. I made the turkey chili the night before and put it in the crockpot all day. It was quick yet slow and delicious. You may want to think about a crockpot feature. It would be great to have really good meals waiting for you when you get home by preparing them the night before and then just turning on the crockpot in the morning and going off to work. I made a cornbread the night before to go with the chili, too. So even if I'm late getting home, my kids have something good to eat before hockey, orchestra etc.

—Lisa Rosenblum, via e-mail

Too much of a good thing?

Love, love, love your magazine, read every issue cover to cover and almost always make something new out of it. One of my favorite articles every month is Quick & Delicious. Whenever I need something "quick and delicious" for dinner and I'm out of ideas, I flip to the back page of old issues until I find one that tempts my palate and for which I have the ingredients. So, I have special affection for that page, and I have to say, although more is often better, in this case I really loved the showcase you gave to one simple meal. I have always liked the quick hit and appealing spread of that page, and the new format just doesn't have the same impact. Thought you ought to know.

—Lucy Wildrick, via e-mail

Salt early to salt less

Here's an excerpt from a discussion thread on Cooks Talk (our reader forum on www.finecooking.com) in response to the article on salt by Michele Anna Jordan (*Fine Cooking* #49, p. 65):

I try to impress on my students that a little salt in judicious tiny pinches will do its work more effectively than a lot of corrective salt at the end. The mantra in culinary training is "taste and correct the seasoning," but if the dish hasn't been seasoned, it's more than correcting that needs to be done. Also, it seems we forget that salt and pepper perform very different jobs in seasoning, so reaching for both at the same time doesn't always work. Pepper is like a condiment, it adds



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to the dish. Salt has a job to do. It's a working mineral.

—Glenys, from *Cooks Talk*

We need to balance fat and flavor

The letter from Meredith Kusch in *Fine Cooking* #48 (p. 14) took the words out of my mouth. I've been a subscriber from the first issue and love the techniques and recipes in your magazine, but the fat content has left me reading more and using less. I've begun to think of butterfat as "cheating" in devising a good recipe—almost anything will taste great if it's rich with cream and butter. A truly great cook can make a tasty dish that will stand on its own, without the heart-stopping cholesterol. To be fair, there are times when only comfort food packed with cream and cheese will do the trick—which makes low-fat recipes all the more important for finding balance and reason in our diets! Thanks for taking note and presenting options.

—Carol Koebbeman,
Sacramento, California

Just eat less

Just received the most recent *Fine Cooking*...love your magazine. In this issue was a request from a reader that you reduce the fat content in your recipes and the editor's reply explaining why fat is important in cooking. Please do not reduce the fat. There are many "light" cooking magazines that have reduced-fat recipes. The very reason I like your magazine is because I'm looking for great taste. If I want to cut fat, I'll eat less. Keep up the good work!

—Anne M. Vandervliet,
Canton, Connecticut

It's not rocket science

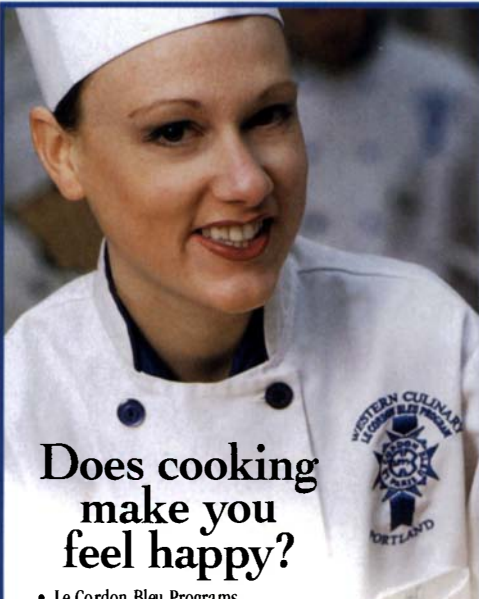
I'd like to comment on the debate in your Letters column about lowering the fat content of recipes. I'm so weary of these letters about "please cut down the fat." I mean, really, cutting down fat in a recipe is not rocket science. I do it on an almost daily basis. Why is it people want to cut down fat in recipes for the wonderful food they could eat, while they stuff themselves with Cokes, chips, and all manner

of other obnoxious "junk food." I'm not saying that your readers do this, but the average American does. Every time I read one of these letters, it reminds me of the time I was enjoying a nice cold beer at a cookout and one of the other guests told me she could drink 100 diet Cokes for the calories in that one beer I was drinking. My response? Who would want to?

—Carol C. Walsh,
Peterborough, New Hampshire

We goofed


In the braising chart on p. 60 of *Fine Cooking* #49, the braised pork shoulder with apple cider, thyme, and tomatoes should call for 4 pounds boneless pork shoulder, which will take about 2½ hours to cook. Also, in the same chart, although the ½ cup cooked chickpeas listed with the braised lamb shanks will be tasty enough, those chickpeas really belong as a garnish in the braised chicken legs with preserved lemons and olives directly above. We heartily apologize to anyone for whom we may have caused a problem. ♦




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A few ways to clean mushrooms

I'm always reading different instructions for cleaning mushrooms. Some say to use a brush, others says water is okay, and some suggest both things. Is there one definitive method for cleaning mushrooms?

—Chelsea Givivan,
via e-mail

Amy Farges replies: Unfortunately, no. You're better off cleaning mushrooms on a case-by-case basis, though one criterion—whether the mushrooms are cultivated or wild—helps determine the best cleaning method.

Cultivated mushrooms usually present fewer problems for cleaning than wild. Grown in sawdust, dirt, and other grainy mediums, cultivated mushrooms do have grime, but it's mostly superficial. Several varieties, like beech, enoki, or oyster, rarely need more than a trim of the

clean, begin by gently wiping each mushroom with a damp paper towel or a soft brush. Wild mushrooms with hollow stems (such as black trumpet or yellowfoot) or cavities (like morels) should be split lengthwise to expose their interiors; clean the interior with a paper towel or a soft brush.

At this point, depending on the level of grittiness, you may have to wash the mushrooms. Sure, the mushrooms will lose a little in flavor and texture. But while this loss would hardly be noticeable in the finished dish, the unpleasant sensation of grit between the teeth certainly would be.

To clean mushrooms with water, put them in a colander and use the spray nozzle or gently running water. Turn the mushrooms and rub them lightly with your fingers. To undo any damage from the absorption of water, immediately transfer the mushrooms to a dry sauté pan and cook off the water over high heat. Remove the mushrooms from the pan before beginning the recipe. If your recipe involves sautéing, heat the olive oil or other fat before reintroducing the mushrooms to the pan. *Amy Farges is the owner of the mail-order mushroom company Marché aux Delices (www.auxdelices.com) and the author of The Mushroom Lover's Mushroom Cookbook & Primer.*

What's the difference between an essence and an extract?

Whenever I read about essences and extracts, the terms seem to be used

interchangeably. Yet in some cookbooks, the two flavorings are listed separately. What is the difference, if any, between an essence and an extract?

—Robert T. Kovacik,
Rockford, Illinois

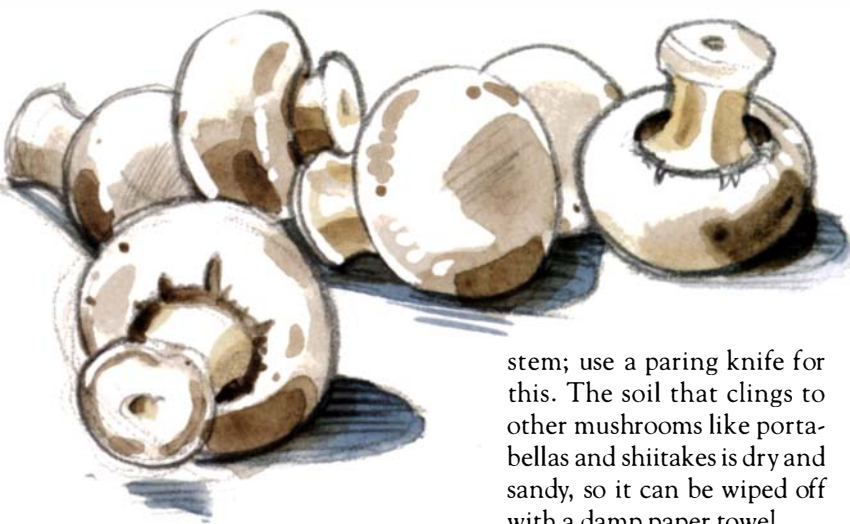
Carole Bloom replies: Both culinary extracts and essences are highly concentrated flavorings obtained from various foods such as fruits, spices, herbs, vegetables, and flowers either by a process of distillation or by infusion. What happens to this liquid after infusion or distillation determines whether it becomes an essence or an extract.

Essences, also called essential oils, are left in a very concentrated state, keeping their intense flavor intact. Conversely, extracts are produced by diluting this concentrated product with alcohol, producing a milder liquid.

Some flavorings are available as both an extract and an essence. This is true of vanilla. Vanilla oleoresin, the essential oil of vanilla, can be used in place of vanilla extract: use just a few drops in place of a teaspoon of extract. The same holds true for other extracts, such as lemon and orange. Keep in mind that essences aren't as widely available as extracts.

There is no set rule for the amounts to use when substituting essences and extracts for each other. It's best to follow the recipe and substitute only if necessary.

Carole Bloom, CCP, is the author of six cookbooks, including Cookies for Dummies, All About Chocolate, and Sugar & Spice.



stem; use a paring knife for this. The soil that clings to other mushrooms like portabellas and shiitakes is dry and sandy, so it can be wiped off with a damp paper towel.

Wild mushrooms demand more intensive techniques because they usually have hollows or crevices that may trap dirt, sand, pine needles, and the occasional insect. To

Store potatoes and onions separately

Is there any truth to the old wives' tale that potatoes and onions spoil more quickly when stored together?

—Annie Pease,
Littleton, Colorado

Nora Olsen replies: Potatoes and onions are a great culinary combination, but storing them in the same place may indeed lead to premature spoilage.

The main reason for this is that the two root vegetables demand different storage environments, so if they're kept together, one of them will suffer. Fresh potatoes should be stored in a place with cool temperatures (40° to 45°F)

and high humidity (90% or higher) to keep them firm and to prevent moisture loss (which causes shrinkage). Onions, on the other hand, are best stored at even cooler temperatures (32° to 45°F) but at a lower humidity (50% to 70%). This low level of humidity prevents breakdown and rot.

Another problem with storing the two vegetables together is that potatoes contain

approximately 80% water, and some of this water is released during storage. This released moisture increases the humidity around the onions and can cause rot and decay.

A final dilemma in storing the two vegetables together is the potential release of the plant growth hormone ethylene from onions. Some potato specialists hypothesize that this release of ethylene, although only in small quanti-

ties, can cause potatoes to sprout. There have been few tests to prove this phenomenon, but the specialists think that the quantities of potatoes and onions would need to be large (at least 100 pounds) for it to make a noticeable impact, if any.

To keep potatoes at their best, store them in a dark, cool spot that has a good level of humidity; many people prefer the cupboard under the sink. Onions should also be stored in a dark, cool spot, but it's important that the area be dry. Both potatoes and onions need air, so don't store either in plastic bags.

Dr. Nora Olsen is a potato extension specialist at the University of Idaho. ♦



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AT THE MARKET

BY AMY ALBERT



Icicle radishes



Red globe radishes

Radishes come in many shapes

Radishes somehow seem like a well-kept secret, but I'm on a mission to give them the attention they deserve. Sure, they brighten up a vegetable platter. But a good radish is more than just a pretty face: that crunchy, peppery freshness is a delicious wake-me-up. Varieties include the oft-seen red globe (which is mildly peppery), icicle (a bit more peppery), and watermelon (mildly peppery and especially striking for its fuchsia hue and sweet flavor). The white-tipped red variety is known as the French breakfast radish, so named because it's especially mild.

Radishes taste best in cool weather, before summer's heat sets in, which makes them bitter. Bigger specimens like watermelon radishes can be good keepers—farmers often cellar them for best flavor. If you can, buy small radishes in

bunches with the greens still attached; these are fresher than those in plastic bags, which may have been sitting around for a while. The tops should look bright green and fresh, and the radishes themselves should be firm and as unblemished as possible. When you get a bunch home, cut off the greens and refrigerate the radishes wrapped loosely in plastic.

Although I've seen recipes for glazed and braised radishes, I prefer to eat them raw. Halved and sprinkled with salt or smeared with sweet butter is a great start. Globe and icicle radishes add great crunch and flavor to sesame noodles and colorful slaws; they're a fine stand-in for daikon (another radish). Best of all, radishes make a delicious salad that's a welcome change from tossed greens. I love the one at right.



Watermelon radishes

Radish & Parsley Salad with Lemon

Try this salad with red globe, icicle, or watermelon radishes. *Serves two to three.*

About 10 medium or 12 small red radishes, scrubbed

3 large ribs celery, ends trimmed, peeled

1 cup tightly packed fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves

1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice; more to taste

¼ tsp. coarse salt; more to taste

2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

Freshly ground black pepper

Trim the root and stem end of the radishes. Halve them lengthwise and then slice them ⅛ inch thick; you should have about 1½ cups. Slice the celery crosswise ⅛ inch thick. Combine the sliced radishes, sliced celery, and parsley leaves in a medium bowl. Add the lemon juice, salt, and olive oil; toss well. Add several generous grinds of black pepper, taste and adjust seasonings, and serve.

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Grab fresh soft-shell crabs while you can

Soft-shell crabs come to market from about April to October. They're not a separate species of crab; rather, a soft-shell crab is a blue crab (found on the East and Gulf coasts) that has just shed its hard shell and has been plucked from the sea within hours after molting. The best way to judge freshness is to smell, so at the market, ask for a whiff: soft-shell crabs should smell

pleasantly like the ocean. Also, have the fishmonger poke the crab's outside to show you that it's good and soft.

Soft-shell crabs are sold live and thus need a little preparation before you cook them. Once trimmed, the whole crab is edible. Trimming is quite simple but does involve snipping off the eyes, pulling out the gill tissue under the two flaps on the crab's underside, and pulling off the crab's apron. (If all this makes you queasy, it's fine to request that the fish merchant clean your crabs; they usually ask, anyway.) In either case, hurry the crabs home and eat them the same day.

Soft-shell crabs are best cooked simply: rinse them and pat them dry, and then dredge them in some flour seasoned with salt and a pinch of chili powder, if you like. Then sauté the crabs in butter until browned on each side, deglaze the pan with some lemon or lime juice, and drizzle the pan sauce over the crabs.

For a simple dessert, try sweet, tender litchis



Though sometimes called litchi or lychee nuts, fresh litchis are in fact a fruit with a floral, tangy-sweet flavor and chewy tenderness that's head and shoulders above canned litchis in heavy syrup. They're thought of as Asian, but litchis grown in Mexico and Israel are starting to become more available in markets here in the United States. So, next time you're looking for a simple but exotic dessert, serve a bowlful—the scaly red skins are wonderful to look at, and the floral-sweet flavor and silky-chewy meat make for great eating. Just dig your fingernail into the skin, pop the fruit out, and take care not to swallow the brown seed in the center.

*Amy Albert is
Fine Cooking's
senior editor.* ♦

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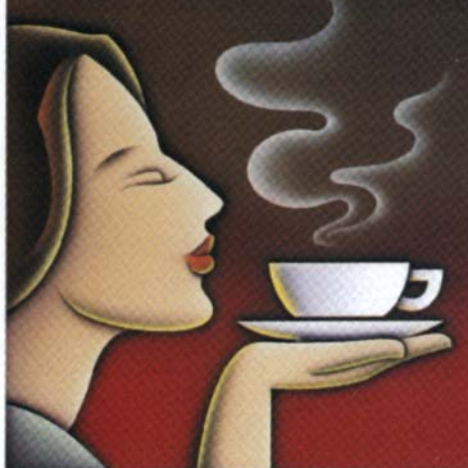
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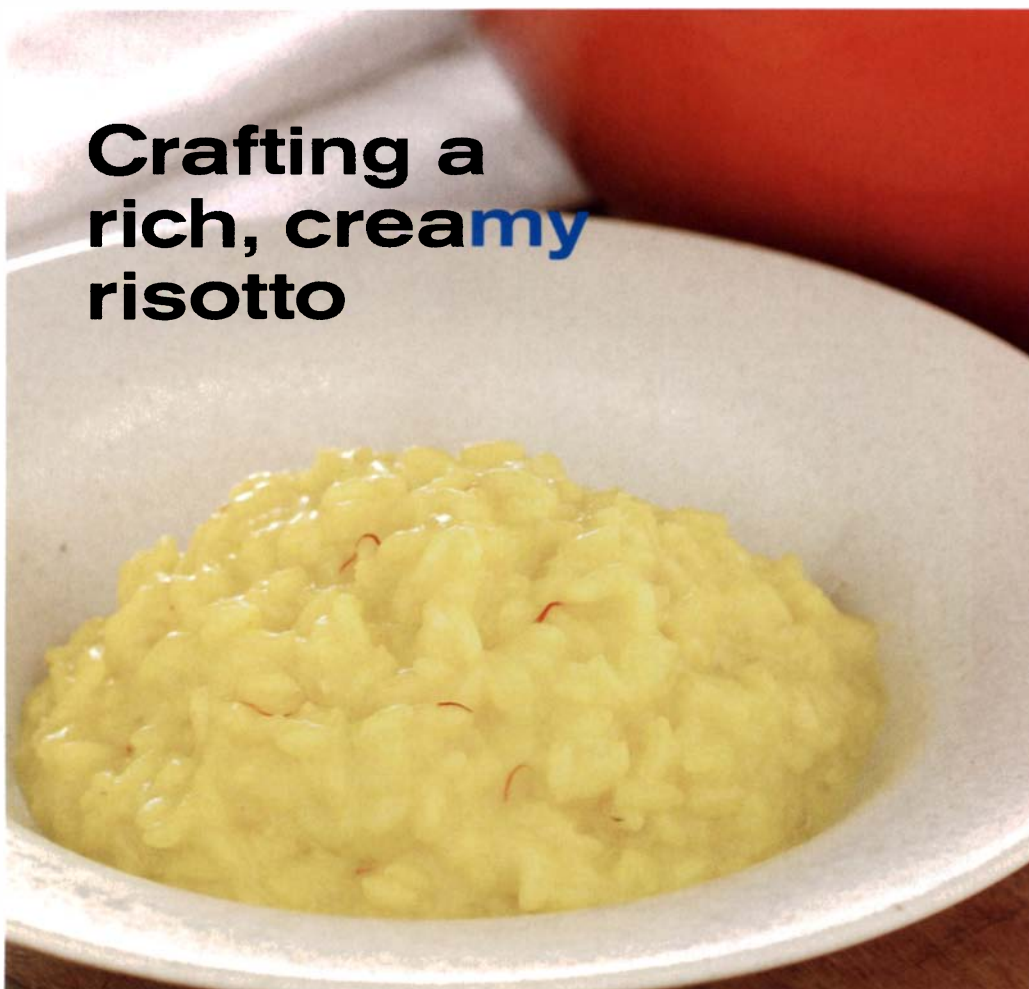
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BY JAMES PETERSON

Crafting a rich, creamy risotto



The Italian rice dish known as risotto is one of those foods that, like soufflés and puff pastry, can strike fear in the hearts of even the most stalwart cooks. But while some of these anxieties are well founded—soufflés can fall, puff pastry can fail to rise—not much can really go wrong with risotto. After all, it's just rice.

Add liquid gradually and stir, stir, stir

The main difference between the risotto technique and other rice cooking techniques is that for risotto, the liquid is added gradually and the rice is stirred often during cooking, as opposed to adding all

the liquid at once and not stirring. The frequent stirring is what helps release the starch from the rice to give risotto its creamy texture.

To make risotto: First, cook aromatic ingredients such as onion and garlic in a little fat, and then add the rice. Stir the rice for a few minutes in the fat to toast it a little. Next, pour in your cooking liquid—usually broth—one or two cups at a time (depending on how much risotto you're making) and stir often (not constantly) until the rice feels cooked but not mushy when you nibble a grain. It takes about twenty minutes from the first addition of liquid to

reach this stage. Keeping the liquid hot in a separate pot aids the process because the temperature of the risotto doesn't drop every time you add more liquid. Once the rice is fully cooked, fold in whatever finishing ingredients you like. It's that simple.

Choose the right rice for risotto

To achieve the proper texture and consistency of a risotto, use one of several medium- to short-grain Italian rice varieties. These rices have a different starch composition than long-grain rice, and it's mainly the starch that determines the texture of the cooked rice. Long-grain rice

cooks up light and fluffy with separate grains (the reason why it isn't right for risotto). The Italian rices give off lots of glutinous starch as they cook, resulting in the creamy, thick, saucy consistency that's the trademark of risotto, but they also remain slightly "toothy" in the center when cooked, making for an interesting textural contrast with the sauce.

Arborio is probably the best known and most widely available variety of risotto rice in North America, but other lesser-known Italian varieties, like carnaroli, viadone nano, and baldo, can also be found in some supermarkets and gourmet shops.

Flavor your risotto in many ways

Beyond the decision of which rice to use, you also have lots of options for flavoring your risotto. Your first opportunity comes when you sweat your aromatics in fat at the beginning of the cooking process. Onion is pretty much universal in risottos (or *risotti*, in Italian), and garlic is common, too, but you can also add other long-cooking vegetables, dried herbs and spices, or cubes of meat or poultry. The fat you use affects flavor, too. Butter, olive oil, or the rendered fat from pork products like prosciutto, pancetta, or bacon are the best choices.

The cooking liquid is another big flavor component. Most of the liquid is usually chicken, fish, meat, or vegetable broth, but a small amount of wine (which should be at room temperature) is often added before the broth to give the risotto a

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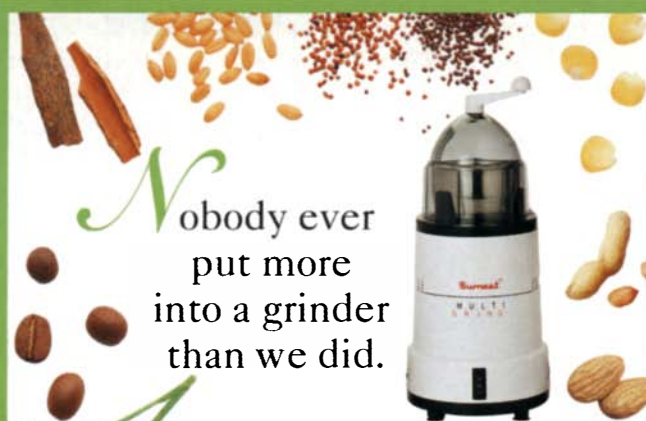
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slightly acidic tang. When red wine is used, it gives the risotto a beautiful reddish hue. For every one cup rice, you'll generally need about three cups liquid, plus one-half to one cup more to allow for evaporation and for final consistency adjustments.

Other ingredients, such as vegetables, fish, and shellfish can be added at various stages (depending on their individual cooking times) throughout the cooking process. And when your risotto is fully

cooked, you can finish it off with other raw or cooked ingredients such as chopped tomatoes or duck confit, a handful of chopped fresh herbs, a grating of *parmigiano reggiano*, or perhaps a drizzle of truffle oil.

Making risotto ahead

Once risotto is fully cooked, it doesn't hold well and should

be served right away. If you want to make it ahead of time for a dinner party, cook it about two-thirds of the way, and then spread it on a baking sheet to cool and refrigerate it until later in the day. Then, about ten minutes before you're ready to serve, return the risotto to the stovetop, add the remaining broth, and continue to sim-

mer and stir until it's fully cooked. The risotto may not be quite as creamy as one made all at once, but it will still be very good.

James Peterson has written many cookbooks, including Essentials of Cooking, Sauces, and Fish & Shellfish. He's a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦

Risotto alla Milanese (Risotto with Parmesan & Saffron)

While it would be unfair to say that this is the risotto after which all others are derived—the Venetians provide plenty of competition—its lovely simplicity is hard to match. If you're uneasy about risotto, this is a good recipe to start with because it's simple and requires so few ingredients. *Serves six as a first course.*

1 medium onion, very finely chopped
8 Tbs. unsalted butter
1 lb. (2 cups) arborio, vialone nano, or carnaroli rice, or other medium- or short-grain Italian rice
½ cup dry white wine
6 cups hot homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth; more as needed
½ tsp. saffron threads
1 cup finely grated Parmesan, preferably parmigiano reggiano
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

For the method, follow the photos and captions at right.

Four simple steps to risotto



In a heavy-based saucepan that's large enough to hold the rice with plenty of room left over, cook the onion in 2 tablespoons of the butter over medium heat until it's translucent and fragrant, about 5 minutes.



Stir in the rice and cook it over medium heat for about 3 minutes. Add the wine, 2 cups of broth, and the saffron. Turn the heat to high until the broth comes to a simmer and then adjust the heat to maintain a steady simmer.



Cook until most of the liquid has been absorbed, stirring every minute or two (there's no need to stir constantly). Add another cup of broth and keep cooking, stirring, and adding broth until the rice is *al dente* but not raw or grainy in the middle.



When the rice is ready, stir in the cheese. Add a little more broth to give the risotto the consistency you like (from fairly tight to almost soupy). Off the heat, stir in the remaining 6 tablespoons butter. Season with salt and pepper and ladle onto heated plates or bowls.

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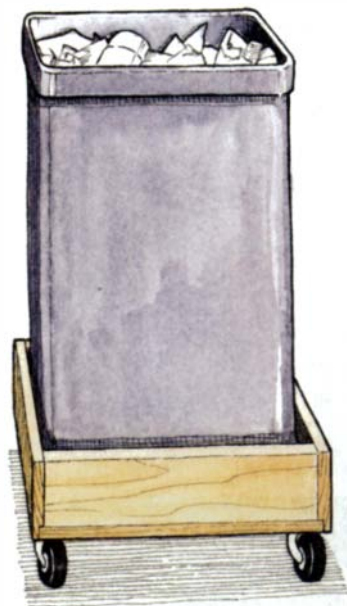
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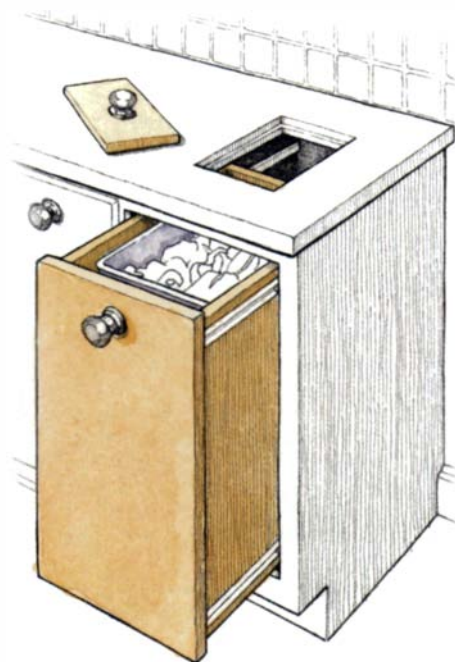
Watch this space for a new "Kitchen Detail" next issue. We'll bring you an inside look at one great kitchen with lots of smart features.

Where to put the trash?

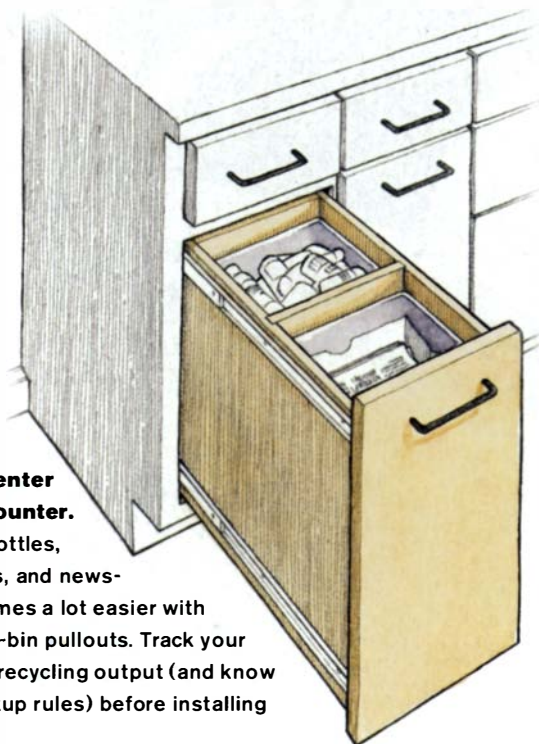
Figuring out where to put the trash may not be the most exciting aspect of kitchen design, but it's one of the most vital. A waste bin is opened, closed, pulled, and dragged constantly throughout the day. There's also more to think about than just garbage. You have to be green—cans, glass bottles, plastic, and newspapers all complicate the traditional one-bin-under-the-sink system. In addition to accessibility and aesthetics, you might also need to consider child- and pet-proofing the area. The ideas on this page show how you can tailor solutions to fit your needs.



Garbage can on wheels. Instead of bringing the cutting board to the trash can, roll the can to the board. A simple wooden trolley like the one shown here also raises the can so it's even closer to the counter.



A trap door for trash. A hole in the countertop lets you slide vegetable trimmings and anything else directly into the garbage. The lid hides the hole (and odors) and the pull-out cabinet door makes it easy to remove the garbage.



Recycling center under the counter. Organizing bottles, cans, plastics, and newspapers becomes a lot easier with one- and two-bin pullouts. Track your household's recycling output (and know the local pickup rules) before installing the bins.



Designated drawers for compost, dishtowels, and detergents. Shallow top drawers are for compost and clean towels. (A plastic bin lifts out to neatly transfer the compost to the garden.) Deep bottom drawers house cleaning supplies and dirty dishtowels.

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The perfect Mother's Day Gift for everyone's mom.

BY SHIRLEY O. CORRIHER

Even those who “can’t stand” fish become fish lovers when they taste very fresh, perfectly prepared lean fish. But cooking good fish depends on buying good, fresh fish in the first place. Understanding something of the chemistry of fish can help guide you through both the fish market and the kitchen.

Why fish is so perishable

To get the freshest fish possible, chefs at expensive seafood restaurants buy fish when it’s still “in rigor” because that guarantees the fish is freshly caught and still sterile.

All animals go through rigor mortis at death. The release of lactic acid causes the muscles to contract and stay contracted for a period of time. In beef, rigor lasts about a day, and in pork and fowl, it lasts about six hours. In fish, rigor starts sooner and lasts for a shorter time.

Fishermen, however, can delay and prolong rigor (and therefore prolong freshness) by minimizing the fish’s struggle during the catch and by chilling it promptly. Some fish, such as halibut, have a longer rigor and keep better than most. In an ideal world, fish would arrive at our markets still in or just coming out of rigor—at the absolute peak of freshness.

Unfortunately, this isn’t an ideal world, and by the time fish gets to us, it usually has long since passed out of this pristine state. At that point, marine microorganisms on and in the fish begin to cause deterioration. Freezing slows the process down, but some of these microorganisms flourish even at temperatures as low as 18°F, well below freezing. So

the deterioration continues even while the fish is frozen.

When you get fish home, try my storing tip to help keep it fresh. Put whole fish or fillets in a large strainer set over a bowl. Pile ice high on top of the fish and refrigerate. The ice keeps the fish close to 32°F, and as it melts, the water continually rinses off bacteria and drains it into the bowl.

with jet black pupils, and pink to red gills. The signs of progressing spoilage are easy to spot: dull, opaque skin, soft flesh, cloudy, sunken eyes, and gray gills.

Fillets are harder to judge, but you can still get a good sense of freshness by their smell and texture. The flesh should be firm, not gaping, falling apart, or mushy. Keep

are stacked on top of one another in parallel layers, like cord wood, with very thin, delicate sheets of connective tissue at each end of the stack of short fibers.

These sheets of connective tissue are not only very thin, they’re also more sensitive to heat than meat connective tissue (joints and tendons). It doesn’t take much heat or time for the connective tissue of fish to melt away to gelatin, leaving the short fibers to separate, or flake. This is why fish can literally fall apart when

it’s cooked or transferred to a serving platter. You might consider cooking fish on a heatproof serving pan or dish, so that you don’t have to move it once it’s cooked.

How can you tell when fish is done? Although many recipes say to cook fish until it flakes, you might find that the fish has lost so much moisture by then that it tastes dry and bland. Instead, watch for a change in color and translucence. Raw natural proteins (whether in fish or another animal) are separate units. There’s plenty of space for light to pass through these individual proteins, giving raw fish a glassy, translucent appearance. When heated, these independent proteins unwind and link up with other proteins; in other words, the proteins cook or coagulate. Light can no longer pass between them, and the fish gradually becomes opaque. Unless you’re aiming for rare tuna or salmon, opacity is a good indication that the fish is done.

Food scientist Shirley Corriher is the author of Cook Wise. ♦

Keeping fresh fish at its best



This will slow down the spoilage process, but it’s nevertheless crucial to buy only very fresh fish and cook and eat it the same day, if possible.

Beware the fishy smell

Besides rigor, appearance and odor can reveal a lot about freshness. Fresh fish may have a clean, sea smell, but a “fishy” or ammonia odor tells you that protein deterioration has begun and the fish is past its prime. If you’re choosing a whole fish, you’ll know that it’s extremely fresh if it has shining, iridescent skin, springy flesh, clear, bright eyes

in mind that some oily fish, such as tuna and mackerel, will taste fishy no matter how fresh they are. If you want completely nonfishy taste, stay with lean, white-fleshed varieties, like sole, flounder, orange roughy, cod, and haddock, to name a few.

Short muscle fibers make fish naturally tender

Muscle fibers in beef, pork, and poultry are thin and long, up to a foot in length, and they’re connected via tough tendons. In contrast, fish muscle fibers are thick and short, one inch at most. They



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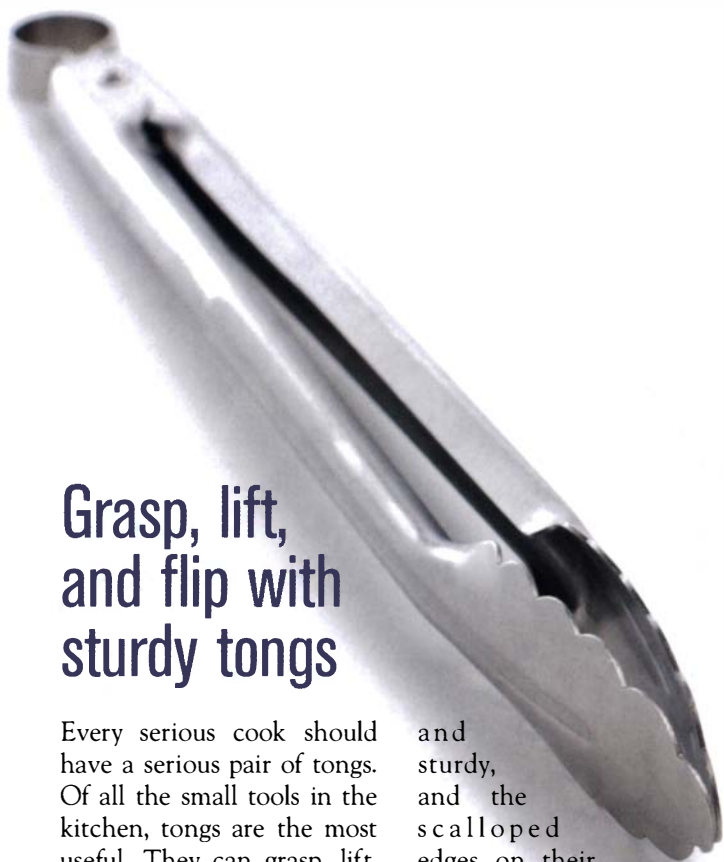
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Grasp, lift, and flip with sturdy tongs

Every serious cook should have a serious pair of tongs. Of all the small tools in the kitchen, tongs are the most useful. They can grasp, lift, and flip foods; manipulate hot pan handles, lids, and oven and grill racks; move hot baking sheets and roasting pans around in the oven; dive into hot oil to fish out fried foods; and, in a pinch, behave like a spoon.

Cuisipro makes a very good line of restaurant-quality stainless-steel tongs. They feel reassuringly strong

and sturdy, and the scalloped edges on their wide grasping ends are gentle on foods. These tongs also have a hanging loop that, when pulled up, locks them closed for neat storage. Available from Chef's Catalog (800/884-2433; www.chefscatalog.com) in 9½-, 12- and 16-inch lengths, they sell for \$6, \$8, and \$10.

—Jennifer Armentrout,
test kitchen manager



Hand-crafted vinegar that won't blow the budget

Sometimes I make the mistake of buying a poor-quality wine vinegar at the grocery store just because the price looks good. Then, when I add a dash to a pan sauce or use one for a quick vinaigrette, I'm so disappointed when my food tastes funny. At the same time, it's hard to plunk down the money for a super-aged balsamic. A perfect compromise

for the good cook's pantry: two new excellent vinegars from the makers of an equally good olive oil, Lucini. Lucini's new Gran Riserva balsamico, aged for ten years, is rich, mellow, and not too sweet. It retails for \$11.99 at good grocery stores and specialty markets. And I was really pleased to find Lucini's Pinot Grigio vinegar for \$7.99; just like the wine, it's light, crisp, and lively.

Both vinegars make excellent vinaigrettes, though I really enjoyed the balsamico in a dish of braised chicken thighs with tomatoes, olives, and rosemary. The Pinot makes an outstanding base for a butter sauce for fish or chicken. For more information, call 888/558-2464 or visit www.lucini.com.

—Susie Middleton, executive editor

An affordable alternative to caviar

If you ever crave caviar but feel like you need a bank loan to afford the good stuff, you'll want to know about the new line of domestic farmed whitefish roes by Tsar Nicoulai, an importer and purveyor of caviar. Its whitefish roes aren't dead-ringers for high-end caviar, nor do they pretend to be: they're milder and mellow. American Golden whitefish roe (a sunny yellow color) and Tiger Eye whitefish roe (an earthy brown that reminds me

of top-grade caviar) taste pleasantly of the sea. The eggs are tiny and crunchy—they taste worlds apart from the overly salted, shelf-stabilized roe sold in supermarkets.

These domestic whitefish roes are an easy and affordable way to add a special touch to simple foods. Try a dab on a cracker with *crème fraîche* or on a sliced avocado. Stir some into a butter sauce; spoon a portion onto a baked potato or a poached salmon fillet; or add a dollop or

two to warm sliced potatoes tossed with white wine and olive oil. At \$12 to \$14 for a 3½-ounce jar (about three large spoonfuls), you can afford to indulge.

Also worth a try is Tsar Nicoulai's new line of flavored roes seasoned with beet juice, saffron, and ginger. Try Tsar Nicoulai on the Web at www.tsarnicoulai.com or by calling 800/952-2842.

—Amy Albert, senior editor



Innovative cooking from the cupboard

Despite the glut of cookbooks that cater to quick and easy cooking, few offer extraordinary results. The new cookbook *Off the Shelf* (\$25; 192 pp.), by Australian food writer Donna Hay, is worth a look: it certainly surpassed my expectations with highly flavorful, almost elegant food that can truly be made quickly.

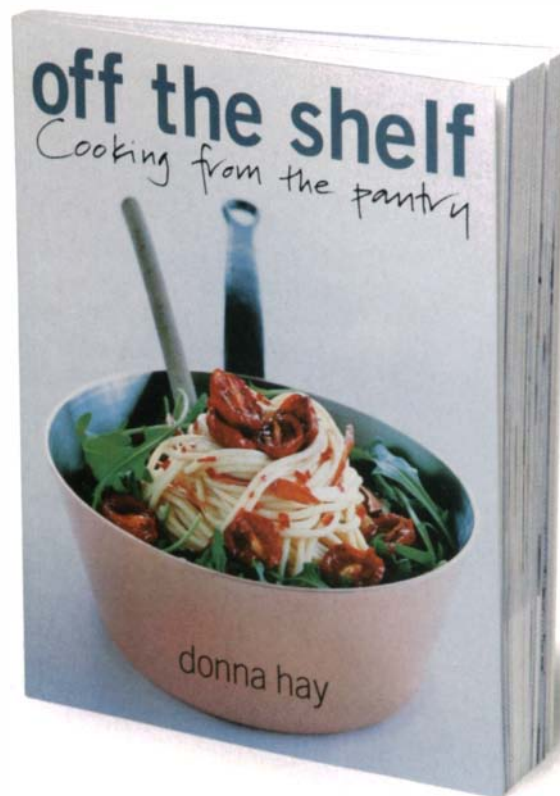
As the book's title indicates, Hay focuses on meals that use the pantry—albeit a sophisticated one, full of

specialty items like Thai red curry paste and white miso paste—as the genesis for over 190 Mediterranean- and Asian-inspired recipes. The sometimes esoteric ingredient list is a worthwhile trade-off: while you might have to run out to the store to buy an ingredient, the overwhelmingly easy recipes—often with as few as five or six ingredients and a pared-down paragraph of instructions—demystify many ethnic preparations. The

condensed recipe format also makes room for the serene, stylish photographs throughout the book, each one beckoning you to the stove.

Crisp, spiced Thai chicken and Asian-style ribs were both winners in my kitchen, easy to compose and full of clever little techniques. "So that's the way to make these," I thought as I watched the ribs turn a caramelly-sweet, reddish hue in the oven.

—Tony Rosenfeld,
assistant editor ♦



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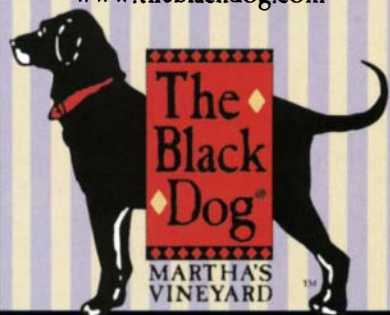
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Sirloin steak, Japanese style

The Japanese have a great affection for a thick slice of juicy *su-te-eki*, a “steak” in Japanese. This love affair with beef officially began about 130 years ago, when the emperor lifted the ban on eating it. But the rich flavor of beef had seduced the country (especially the local feudal lords) far earlier, ever since its arrival with the European traders in the sixteenth century. When one local warlord wanted to

send a tribute to the Shogun in the capital, he sent “forbidden” beef. To preserve the beef for the weeks-long journey, he covered it in miso (a salty, fermented soybean paste; see the sidebar on the opposite page). Thus was born a now-classic Japanese dish, *gyuniku no misozuke*, or beef marinated in miso.

The high salt content of the miso preserves the meat and also alters its texture,



As the taste for “forbidden” beef migrated northward in Japan, a new method for preparing it was born.

RECIPE

Miso-Marinated Sirloin Steak (*Gyuniku no misozuke*)

As an accompaniment, try stir-fried rice. I like to use the trimmed beef fat (rendered over low heat) as the cooking oil, but it's also fine to use vegetable oil. *Serves four.*

- 7 oz. (¾ cup) brown miso (also called *akamiso* or red miso)
- ½ cup mirin (sweet cooking wine)
- ¼ cup sake (rice wine)
- 1½ lb. top sirloin steak, 1 inch thick, excess fat trimmed
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- ¼ cup brandy

In a medium bowl, combine the miso, ¼ cup of the mirin, and the sake to make a soft paste. Spread about one-third of the paste (a heaping ⅓ cup) in a large pan or platter that will hold the steak. Lay two layers of cheesecloth over the miso marinade and set the steak on top. Cover with two more layers of cheesecloth. Spread the remaining miso marinade on top. Cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate 5 to 10 hours, or overnight. (If marinating overnight, don't leave the marinade on the meat longer than 10 hours; remove the steak from the marinade, wrap it in plastic, and refrigerate until you're ready to cook.)

Remove the steak from the cloth, reserving 2 Tbs. of the marinade. If there is any miso paste on the beef, gently wipe it off with a paper towel.

Heat a large skillet on medium high and add the oil. When it's hot, add the steak, browning it on one side for 3 to 4 min. Reduce the heat to medium low and cook for another 3 min. Turn the steak over, increase the heat to medium high, and brown on the other side for about 2 min. Reduce the heat to medium low and cook until medium rare, another 1 to 2 min. Check the doneness by pressing the meat with your fingers or by making a tiny cut into it (remember that it will continue to cook a bit off the heat). When it's resilient outside but feels soft as you press deeper, it's rare. A 1-inch-thick steak will take about 10 min. to cook to medium rare.

Transfer the steak to a plate and cover loosely. Pour off any excess oil from the skillet, set the skillet over medium heat, and add ½ cup water and the remaining ¼ cup mirin, scraping up any browned bits to help them dissolve. Add the reserved 2 Tbs. miso marinade, lower the heat, and cook, stirring, for 2 min. Remove the pan from the heat and add the brandy (if you're comfortable doing this, light it with a match to burn off some of the alcohol; otherwise, skip this step). Using a sieve lined with cheesecloth, strain the sauce into a small saucepan. Simmer over medium heat until it's slightly thickened. Cut the steak into ⅓- to ½-inch slices and serve drizzled with the sauce.

making it slightly firmer. At the same time, the miso transfers its aroma and flavor to the meat.

Today in Japan, sliced, miso-marinated beef is available at any supermarket, and as a result, not many people do their own marination. I still do because I like having control over the quality of the beef and the proportion of marinade ingredients. I use a thick cut of sirloin steak and strong brown miso, called *akamiso*. The original version used sweet white miso, but I find that the robust flavor of brown miso perfectly comple-

ments and enhances the richness of the beef.

It's important that no miso marinade is clinging to the steak when it's seared because the miso would burn and make the steak bitter. Sandwiching layers of cheesecloth between the steak and the marinade solves this problem; the steak doesn't touch the miso but still picks up its flavor and aroma. Although you could rub the steak directly with the miso mixture, you would need to spend extra time thoroughly removing all the miso residue with paper towels; rinsing the beef

with water would wash away the flavor.

Marination time can range from five hours to overnight. The steak shouldn't stay in the miso marinade longer than ten hours, or it will dry out and get tough.

It isn't so traditional to make a sauce, but I like to use some of the miso marinade, mirin, and brandy to drizzle on the thinly sliced seared steak before serving.

Hiroko Shimbo is a Japanese cooking instructor and consultant. She also leads culinary tours to Japan. ♦

Books

To learn more about the cooking of Japan, Hiroko recommends *Japanese Cooking: A Simple Art*, by Shizuo Tsuji, in addition to her own book, *The Japanese Kitchen*.

Marination kit

One reason that miso-marinated steak is such a great introduction to Japanese cooking is that its special-ingredient list is short—just miso, mirin, and sake, and all are available in North America; see Sources, p. 76. They're three staple ingredients in any Japanese pantry.

Miso (soybean paste)

Miso adds saltiness as well as its complex flavor and aroma to soups, sauces, dressings, marinades, and simmered and stir-fried dishes. Resembling peanut butter in texture without being oily, miso is also a rich source of protein and other nutrients. It's made by fermenting soybeans with cereal grains like rice and barley, salt, and water. By varying the proportion of ingredients and the fermentation time, the producer can alter the color, flavor, saltiness, and texture of the miso. For the recipe at left, choose brown miso, also called *akamiso* or red miso. An open package of brown miso keeps for three to four months in the refrigerator, longer in the freezer.

Mirin (sweet cooking wine)

The sweet golden-yellow wine called mirin was once drunk as an *apéritif*, just as the Spanish sip sherry. This was back when mirin was made artisanally with authentic



ingredients, including glutinous rice. Today, most mirin is made from other starches and is mass-produced, making it unsuitable for drinking straight. Mirin's role in Japanese cooking is as a sweetener—it's more refined and mellower than table sugar and has a distinctive fragrance. When used in a basting sauce, mirin gives meats and fish an appealing gloss. In a marinade, mirin tenderizes in addition to providing flavor.

The best mirin may be labeled *hon-mirin*: *honjozo* ("true mirin: naturally

brewed"). Even though this isn't "real" mirin in the artisanal sense, it does retain some of the traditional processing steps. Lower quality mirin is sold under the name *mirin-fu chomiryo* ("a kind of mirin") and *aji-mirin* ("mirin taste"). Refrigerated, mirin will retain its flavor for two months. A substitute for mirin is 1 tablespoon sake or white wine plus 2 teaspoons sugar.

Sake (rice wine)

Sake (pronounced SAH-kay or SAH-kee) is made by fermenting a particular variety of rice. When used in a marinade, it tenderizes meat. *Sake* also removes unpleasant odors from ingredients while adding a fragrance of its own. Although *sake* types and quality vary widely in Japan, here in North America, the options are limited. Avoid "cooking sake," which ranks in quality right down there with "cooking wine" sold in supermarkets. Instead, buy a bottle of modestly priced *sake* in a wine store. *Sake* can be dry or sweet; choose dry, as its higher acidity helps balance food's flavor. Once opened, *sake* fades quickly. It won't become undrinkable for some time, but as with any fine wine, oxidation kills its flavor and quality within days.

TIPS

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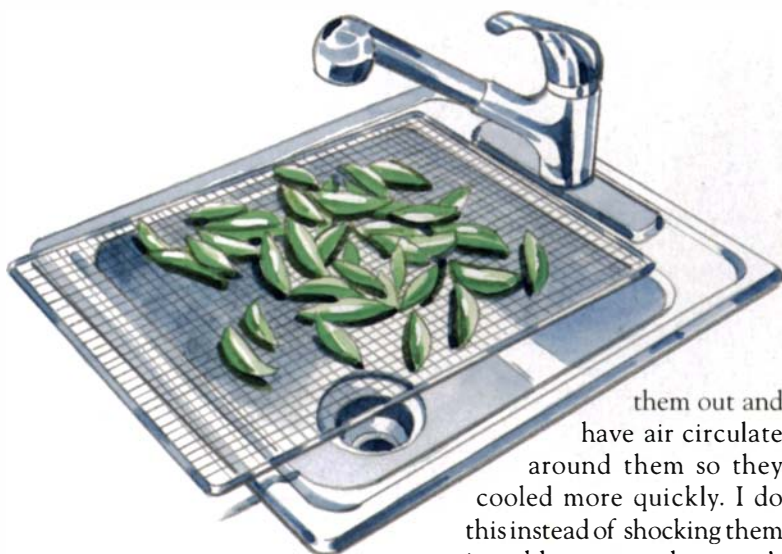
A roasting rack doubles as a cookbook holder

My large V-shaped roasting rack makes a great makeshift cookbook holder. I rest the open book in the V-groove, against one of the angled sides. The rack holds the book up but back at enough of an angle that the pages stay open to where you want without flipping back.

—Ken Fruehstorfer,
Palatine Bridge, New York

Cool blanched vegetables quickly on a wire rack

When I was blanching sugar snap peas recently, instead of draining them in a colander, I straddled a wire cooling rack over the sink and poured the pot of hot sugar snap peas over it. The peas drained easily, and I was able to spread



them out and have air circulate around them so they cooled more quickly. I do this instead of shocking them in cold water so they won't get waterlogged.

—Katy McCabe,
Ipswich, Massachusetts

Use baby food jars to store spices

I save money by buying my spices in bulk at my local natural-foods store, and I like to reuse baby food jars to store the spices. I paint the



Put your roasting rack to
use as a cookbook holder.

lids of the jars and write the name of the spices on the top and sides of the lids with a black magic marker. The stackable jars look attractive stored in my cupboard, and I can see the spices through the clear glass.

—Missy Collier,
Buellton, California

Cool hot soups quickly with “stock cubes”

I'm an avid soup lover who likes to serve just-cooked soups to my family and friends. Sometimes I find that the finished soup is much too hot to serve once it's ready. Since I freeze various stocks in ice-cube trays, I avoid the wait for the soup to cool by taking several cubes of stock out of the freezer, dropping one or two in each soup bowl, and then ladling the hot soup over them. This quickly brings down the temperature of the soup but doesn't dilute the flavor.

—Diane Pietras,
Levittown, Pennsylvania

A reminder to turn off the grill

My husband has, on occasion, forgotten to turn off our gas grill after grilling our dinner. We've solved this problem by keeping a red plastic poker chip with the matches. When he gets the matches to light the grill, he puts the poker chip on the kitchen counter. The chip's bright color makes it quite noticeable. We've

made it a rule not to put the chip away until one of us double-checks the grill after dinner. Once we make sure the grill is turned off, we put the chip back with the matches for next time.

—Patty Ross,
Kerrville, Texas

Save ripe bananas for baking

I don't like to waste extra bananas, so if it seems like I won't be able to eat them all before they overripen, I peel the bananas and put two or three in a small plastic bag, making sure to press most of the air out of the bag before sealing it. Then I press and mash the bananas with my hands and fingers and store the bags flat in my freezer. Now I have mashed bananas the easy way, ready to slip into a pancake batter or quick bread. At a moment's notice, I can quickly thaw the frozen bananas in a bowl of warm water.

—Jeanne Schimmel,
Hobe Sound, Florida

Keep baking soda handy for kitchen chores

I got tired of going to the pantry every time I needed a dab of baking soda to clean something at the sink, and because my hands were usually wet, the box of baking soda always got wet. Now, I keep the baking soda handy by putting it in a glass shaker

Try a rack rather
than a colander
to drain blanched
vegetables; they'll
cool faster.

bottle that once held grated cheese and that has a lid full of large holes. Now the bottle is next to my sink, ready to remove odors, food stains, and coffee and tea rings from my dishes and kitchenware.

—Sara Burns,
Grass Valley, California

Coconut milk without the fat

I keep a bottle of imitation coconut extract in my spice cabinet for recipes that call for coconut milk. Instead of using coconut milk, I add a little of the extract to either whole or skim milk (whisking in some cornstarch or flour to prevent the milk from curdling when heated), and I get a decent imitation of coconut milk.

Though it's not the same, my method avoids all the saturated fat in coconut milk.

—Ana Weerts,
Brookfield, Wisconsin

Use a can for a cake stand

Since I don't own a cake pedestal, I usually improvise one to make frosting a cake easier. I take a large can of tomatoes or beans out of my pantry and put the metal round from the bottom of a cheesecake or tart pan on top of it. (You can also use a cardboard cake round). I secure the metal round to the can with a bit of duct tape. Having the cake up high really makes frosting it easier.

—Cameron Butler,
Lewes, Delaware



Rest asparagus on an overturned pot to make it easier to peel.

Peel asparagus without breaking it in two

When I peel asparagus, I rest most of the stalk on the bottom of an upside-down saucepan. This way, the tip is elevated so I can easily grasp

and rotate it as I peel, but the rest of the stalk is supported by the pot so it won't snap in two from the pressure of the peeler.

—Wayne Armentrout,
McLean, Virginia ♦

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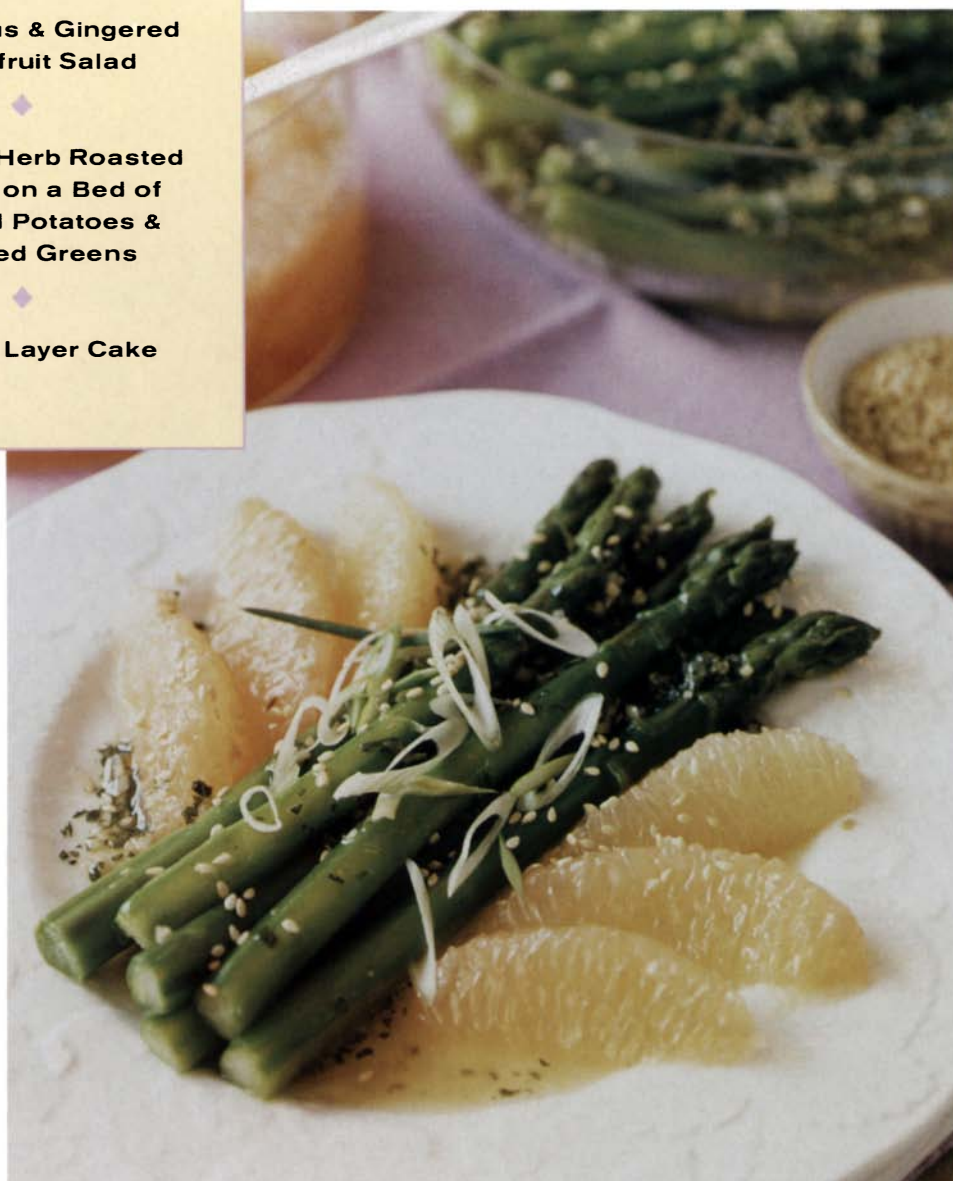
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**Asparagus & Gingered
Grapefruit Salad**

**Lemon & Herb Roasted
Salmon on a Bed of
Roasted Potatoes &
Sautéed Greens**

Orange Layer Cake



An Impressive Dinner,

Use a chef's strategy for prepping ahead;
then enjoy the great food—and company—
at your next party

BY RIS LACOSTE

When *Fine Cooking* called and asked if I could design a dinner menu that felt special and yet was simple to execute, I said, “You have your girl.” Amazingly enough, simple execution is what makes restaurant cooking possible. We do so much ahead—partially cooking ingredients, making sauces, preparing garnishes—that serving dinner to 250 people is a walk in the park. And when you apply the restaurant do-ahead principles, entertaining at home can be as carefree.

Photos: Ben Frink



Without the Stress

But being ready is everything. I've worked out a timeline that guides you through all the advance prep and means that the actual execution of each course will only take you away from your guests for ten minutes or less (see p. 38).

I selected the dishes for this menu in response to this time of year, when winter is fading and we couldn't be more ready for something green. The asparagus salad is fresh and alive, and the ginger and grapefruit really waken the palate. To show off the

salad, you can arrange the components, which are stunning, on a sideboard in your dining room and then plate and serve it from there. The salmon follows, with a great balance between sweet, tart, and bitter, and once it's prepped, it only needs fifteen minutes in the oven. And the orange cake (my mother's recipe) is fresh with the fully ripe and sweet flavor of early spring oranges. Since the cake is completely made ahead, all you need to do to serve dessert is put on a pot of tea. *(Recipes follow)*

Asparagus & Gingered Grapefruit Salad

All the components in this salad can be made ahead (see the sidebar below). It will take you just a few minutes to compose the salad before serving. *Serves six.*

36 large or 42 medium spears asparagus (don't use pencil-thin spears)

Salt

36 sections pink grapefruit (from 4 to 5 grapefruit, see instructions for segmenting in "Tips for prepping and cooking," on p. 40)

1 cup Ginger-Lime Glaze (see the recipe at right)

1¼ cups Asian Vinaigrette (see the recipe at right)

3 scallions (whites only), thinly sliced at an angle

1 Tbs. toasted sesame seeds (substitute half with black sesame seeds, if you like)

Prepare the asparagus—Bring a large pot of salted water to the boil. Prepare an ice bath by filling a large bowl halfway with ice and adding cold water. Snap off the tough bottom part of each stem and peel the asparagus from just below the tip down to the base to eliminate any stringy toughness and to ensure even cooking. (Don't overpeel; use a vegetable peeler to gently remove only the thinnest layer of skin.) Parboil the asparagus until the stems just bend, about 3 min. (Lift one stem out of the water with tongs, hold the base of the stem in your hand. The tip of the asparagus should just bend over at a 45-degree angle.) Transfer the asparagus immediately to the ice bath to stop the cooking and preserve the green color. Remove the asparagus from the water as soon as it's chilled and drain it well. Refrigerate until about 15 min. before you compose the salad so that the asparagus isn't served cold.

Prepare the grapefruit—About an hour before serving, put the grapefruit sections into a bowl and cover with the ginger-lime glaze. Keep refrigerated.

Arrange the salad—Arrange six large salad plates on your counter. Put the asparagus in a shallow container and cover it with a cup or so of the Asian vinaigrette, saving enough to dress the bottom of each

salad plate. Let the asparagus soak in the dressing for a couple of minutes. Meanwhile, cover the bottom of each salad plate with some of the vinaigrette; use the back of a soup spoon to spread it evenly. Arrange a pile of six or seven asparagus spears in the center of each plate. Arrange three grapefruit sections on each side of the asparagus, fanning them out. Sprinkle the sliced scallions over the asparagus and sprinkle some of the sesame seeds over the whole salad (go lightly; you may have extra).

Ginger-Lime Glaze

This glaze lasts indefinitely and makes a great base for iced or hot tea. It's also terrific with seltzer water (use about ¼ cup glaze to 1 cup seltzer and serve cold), so feel free to double the recipe. *Yields scant 1 cup.*

¾ cup roughly chopped or sliced and smashed fresh ginger (from about 6 oz. ginger)

Grated zest of 4 small or 3 large limes

¾ cup tarragon vinegar

¾ cup sugar

Combine all the ingredients in a nonreactive saucepan. Bring to a boil. Remove from the heat and let sit for 5 min. to infuse the flavors. Bring back to a boil and repeat the process. Bring back to a boil for a third time, let cool to room temperature, strain through a coarse sieve, cover, and refrigerate.

Asian Vinaigrette

This dressing will last for several weeks, covered, in the refrigerator, so feel free to double the amounts if you like, and use the extra on grilled shrimp, seared steak, or warm salads. *Yields 1¼ cups.*

3 Tbs. minced fresh ginger

1½ tsp. minced garlic

¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro

3 Tbs. dry sherry

¼ cup rice vinegar

⅓ cup fish sauce (also called *nuac mam*)

2 Tbs. fresh lime juice

1 Tbs. honey



Use a light hand peeling asparagus. Removing just a thin layer of skin gives the spears a tender texture and helps them cook evenly.

Spring menu strategy *The more you do ahead, the more relaxed you'll be when it's dinnertime.*

Several days or one week ahead:

- ◆ Make the ginger-lime glaze for the salad.
- ◆ Make the Asian vinaigrette for the salad.

The day before:

- ◆ Make the filling for the cake and chill.
- ◆ Make the cake layers; wrap in plastic.
- ◆ Toast the pine nuts; macerate the raisins.
- ◆ Roast the garlic cloves.
- ◆ Make the marinade; divide, put salmon in half.
- ◆ Make the lemon oil.

In the morning:

- ◆ Make the frosting and assemble the cake.
- ◆ Slice the oranges for the cake garnish.
- ◆ Section the grapefruit for the salad.
- ◆ Clean the greens and refrigerate.
- ◆ Peel and parboil the asparagus for the salad.
- ◆ Toast the sesame seeds; slice the scallions.
- ◆ Set the table.

One hour to 30 minutes before serving:

- ◆ Put the grapefruit slices in the ginger glaze.
- ◆ Slice and roast the potatoes; leave on a baking sheet.
- ◆ Bring the salmon to room temperature.
- ◆ Arrange the ingredients for the greens near the stove.

To serve:

- ◆ Dress and arrange the asparagus-grapefruit salad.
- ◆ Put the salmon over the potatoes and roast.
- ◆ Warm the dinner plates.
- ◆ Sauté the greens; plate them, the potatoes and salmon; drizzle with the lemon oil.
- ◆ Cut and serve the cake.

A few dashes hot sauce or chile sauce (optional)
Salt to taste
1 Tbs. toasted sesame oil
¼ cup peanut oil

Combine all the ingredients, except for the sesame oil and peanut oil, in a bowl. Whisk in each oil one at a time. Taste and add a bit more salt if you like.

Herb & Lemon Roasted Salmon on a Bed of Roasted Potatoes & Sautéed Greens

The lemon-herb marinade does double-duty in this recipe. Use a generous amount to marinate the salmon, and then drizzle some on the potatoes before roasting. You might still have some leftover; use it to marinate chicken or lamb. I like to highlight the lemon flavor by drizzling a little lemon oil on the salmon just before serving. Don't skip this step: it really pulls the flavors of the dish together. At the restaurant I also serve the salmon with a dollop of homemade garlic mayonnaise, or aioli. You can make your own by adding lots of chopped garlic and a little extra lemon juice to any mayonnaise recipe (or see *Fine Cooking* #38, p. 18B, for a recipe). *Serves six.*

1½ cups olive oil, plus 2 Tbs. for sautéing the greens
3 Tbs. coarsely grated lemon zest
2 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
2 Tbs. fresh thyme
2 Tbs. chopped garlic
6 portions skinless salmon fillet, 6 oz. each
Lemon oil (see "Tips for prepping and cooking," p. 40)
2 lb. medium red or yellow potatoes (or 1 lb. each)
Salt and coarsely ground black pepper
12 cloves garlic, roasted and coarsely chopped
2½ oz. (½ cup) pine nuts, toasted
4 oz. (½ cup) raisins, covered with ¼ cup port and macerated for several hours or overnight (optional)
12 cups packed arugula, about 20 oz. (tough stems removed), or two 10-oz. bags spinach (stems removed), cleaned thoroughly and put in a large bowl covered with damp paper towels and plastic wrap in the refrigerator (you can do this the morning of the party)

ONE DAY AHEAD

Make the marinade—Combine the 1½ cups olive oil, lemon zest, parsley, thyme, and the 2 Tbs. chopped garlic. Keep the marinade covered in the refrigerator.

Marinate the salmon—Preferably the night before or at least 1 hour before cooking, cover the salmon with about 1 cup of the marinade and keep covered in the refrigerator. Reserve the remaining marinade separately in the refrigerator. Make the lemon oil.

ONE HOUR AHEAD

Roast the potatoes—Heat the oven to 425°F. Slice the potatoes ¾ inch thick. (Cut through the shortest width of the potato; discard the ends.) Make sure there are 8 slices per person (48 slices total). Rub a rimmed baking sheet or jellyroll pan with a little oil. Lay 8 potato slices in two slightly overlapping lines about 5 to 6 inches long and a total of 4 inches wide. Repeat with the remaining potatoes to make six separate beds for the salmon. Space the beds an inch apart. Season the potatoes with plenty of salt and pepper and drizzle them with some of the remaining



lemon-herb marinade. Cook until the potatoes are tender and beginning to turn golden brown, 30 to 35 min. Set the potatoes, still on the baking sheet, aside. Reduce the oven temperature to 400°F.

Set the 2 Tbs. olive oil, pine nuts, raisins, chopped roasted garlic, and bowl of washed greens next to the stove and put a large sauté pan on a burner. Take the salmon out of the refrigerator to come to room temperature.

20 MINUTES BEFORE SERVING

Lift the salmon out of the marinade, letting excess oil drain off but leaving the herbs on the salmon undisturbed. Put a fillet on top of each bed of potatoes on the baking sheet. Season generously with salt and pepper. Put the pan in the oven and cook 12 to 14 min. for medium-rare salmon or 16 min. for medium. Pull from the oven and let rest before serving.

While the salmon is resting, heat the sauté pan over medium to medium high, add the olive oil, pine nuts, raisins, and chopped roasted garlic, and simmer for 1 min. Add the arugula or spinach, season with salt

Roast crisp potatoes ahead of time, advises Ris Lacoste. When you're ready to eat, put the marinated salmon onto the potato beds, and pop the whole pan in the oven.

and pepper, and cook until just wilted, 1 to 3 min., tossing with tongs constantly to mix the ingredients. (Add the arugula in batches, if necessary; when the first batch wilts, add the next and toss).

To serve—Using tongs, carefully spread the arugula loosely on the bottom of each plate, almost in a ring. Carefully slide a spatula under a bed of potatoes, lift the potatoes and salmon together, and set them in the center of the plate over the greens. Drizzle a generous 1 tsp. lemon oil over all. Repeat with the remaining salmon. Serve immediately.

Orange Layer Cake

This is my mother's recipe, which I always requested (and got) for my birthday. I love to eat this cake with a cup of Earl Grey tea. To make the cake components ahead, see "Spring menu strategy," p. 38. Leave yourself plenty of time to frost the cake; it works best if filled and then refrigerated before frosting. Remember to zest your oranges before juicing. (See Sources, p. 76, for cardboard cake rounds and offset spatulas). *Serves eight to ten.*

FOR THE FILLING:

2/3 cup sugar
3 Tbs. all-purpose flour
1 cup fresh orange juice (from about 3 large or 4 medium oranges), without pulp
2 large egg yolks
2 Tbs. salted butter

Tips for prepping and cooking

To segment grapefruit:

Slice off enough of the stem and blossom ends of a grapefruit so that you see the ends of the fruit segments. Set the grapefruit on a cutting board on a cut end. Using a sharp knife (I like a serrated one), slice off all the remaining peel and pith, one section at a time, turning the grapefruit after each slice. Trim away any remaining white bits. Set a colander over a bowl. Hold the grapefruit over the colander and use a small, sharp knife to carefully cut along both sides of each membrane, freeing the segments. Let each segment fall into the colander. Once you've freed all the segments, squeeze as much juice as you can from the remaining wheel of membranes and drink the delicious juice.

To toast pine nuts: Spread them in one layer on a baking sheet and put them in a 350°F oven until golden brown, about 5 minutes. Let them cool, put them in a zip-top

bag, and store them unrefrigerated for one day; refrigerate or freeze if holding for longer.

To make lemon oil: Combine 1 cup of your best extra-virgin olive oil with the grated zest of two lemons. Store it in a squeeze bottle or glass jar in the refrigerator.

To roast garlic: Choose your favorite method. In a 350°F oven, roast whole heads drizzled with a little oil just until tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Or roast individual cloves peeled and covered in oil. Even easier, cook peeled cloves slowly in oil on the stovetop (see *Fine Cooking* #49, p. 62). Whichever method you use, your goal is golden, soft, pasty cloves of garlic, sweet, but not bitter from too much cooking. Let the cloves cool, chop them coarsely, and refrigerate. Save any oil you cook the garlic with and use it to sauté the arugula or use in a vinaigrette.

FOR THE CAKE:

2¼ cups (10⅞ oz.) all-purpose flour
2½ tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. salt
⅓ cup salted butter
⅓ cup vegetable shortening
2 tsp. grated orange zest (from about 1 large orange)
1½ cups sugar
3 large eggs
1 cup fresh orange juice (from about 3 large or 4 medium oranges), without pulp

FOR THE FROSTING:

6 oz. (12 Tbs.) salted butter, at room temperature
4½ cups (about 18 oz.) confectioners' sugar
Dash salt
1 tsp. grated orange zest
5 Tbs. fresh orange juice

FOR THE GARNISH:

1 or 2 small oranges, sliced thinly, slices cut halfway through on one side, laid on paper towels to drain
7 or 8 sprigs fresh mint (pick pairs of leaves)

Make the filling—Combine the sugar and the flour in a heavy-based saucepan. Whisk just to mix. Add the orange juice and egg yolks and whisk vigorously again to combine. Put the saucepan over medium-high heat and cook, whisking constantly, until the mixture boils (3 to 4 min.). Cook another 1 min., stirring constantly (the mixture will thicken noticeably and become less cloudy). Be sure it boils for 1 min. so that the filling will thicken enough to support the cake. Remove from the heat and stir in the butter. Transfer to a bowl, cover with plastic wrap (lay the wrap directly on the filling's surface), and refrigerate. Chill thoroughly before using.

Make the cake—Heat the oven to 350°F. Sift together the flour, baking powder, and salt. Grease two 9x1½-inch cake pans and line the bottom of each with a round of kitchen parchment. Lightly flour the sides and bottom of each pan.

In a mixer, cream together the butter, shortening, and zest. Gradually add the sugar, creaming until the mixture is light and fluffy. Scrape down the sides of the bowl. Add the eggs, one at a time, mixing well between additions and scraping down the sides.

Add the sifted dry ingredients alternately with the orange juice to the creamed mixture, beating well on low speed after each addition. Pour equal amounts of the batter into the two prepared cake pans. Tap the pans on the counter before putting them in the oven to remove any air bubbles and to even the batter. Bake until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean, about 28 min. Cool the cake layers in the pans for 10 min. and then loosen the layers by running a knife between the cake and the edge of the pan. Remove the layers from the pans and put them on a rack to continue cooling.

Make the frosting—Cream the butter in the mixer. Add the confectioners' sugar and salt and combine thoroughly. Add the orange zest and mix to combine. Add the orange juice and mix on high speed until well blended, scraping down the sides. It will be light and creamy. Refrigerate if not using right away.

Assemble the cake—When all the components are cool, put one cake layer on a cake stand or a cardboard cake round. Spread the orange filling over



Start in the center and spread gently until the filling is $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick and a bit shy of the edge. Chill before frosting.



Try this pro's trick: Spread a very thin layer of frosting to pick up any stray crumbs. Chill to firm up and then finish with a second, thicker layer of frosting.



A sweeping motion makes a pretty pattern. With an offset spatula, this decoration is easy even for cake novices.

the cake to make a $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch layer; see the photo above. You'll have about $\frac{1}{3}$ cup extra filling; serve it alongside the cake, if you like. Put the second layer on top of the first and refrigerate the cake until the filling has chilled again and firmed up, about 45 min.

Loosen the frosting by beating with a spatula (if it's very stiff, beat it with an electric mixer). Using an icing spatula, spread just a very thin layer of frosting over the whole cake (this is called a "crumb coat" because it secures loose crumbs) and refrigerate the cake to let the frosting firm up, about 10 min. Put on the final coat of frosting, taking care to work gently,

as the top layer of the cake tends to slide around ever so slightly because of the filling. If it slides, just push it back. Create a pattern on the frosting using the icing spatula (heat it up under warm water and dry it). Transfer the cake (on its cardboard or by lifting it with spatulas) to a cake plate or pedestal.

Garnish the cake—Twist the orange slices into "S" shapes and put seven or eight around the top of the cake. Tuck a pair of mint leaves into each orange twist.

Ris Lacoste is the executive chef at 1789 Restaurant in Washington, D.C. ♦



Choose crisp, refreshing Riesling to partner vibrant spring flavors

wine choices

The citrus and Asian flavors in this menu are made for Riesling. And contrary to what you might have heard, Riesling needn't be sugary—this wine is made in a dizzying range of styles, from bone dry to ambrosial sweet.

For the salad, I'd choose the crisp 2000 Pffeffingen Estate dry Riesling (\$12), with delicious fruit flavors and enough racy acidity to stand up to the salad. (If you've ever been stumped about what to serve with asparagus,

know that Riesling happens to be the perfect asparagus wine.) Another good choice would be Bonny Doon's Pacific Rim Riesling (\$10).

For the salmon, try Leeuwin Estate Riesling from Australia's Margaret River region (\$16), which has the body, texture, and richness of wines that go for twice the price. Or for something other than Riesling, a good alternative (also from Down Under) is a Sauvignon Blanc from Grove Mill in New Zealand (\$14).

For dessert, go with a refreshing finish that won't overwhelm your guests with an excessive sugar or alcohol level. Moscato d'Asti, a lightly sparkling Italian dessert wine that's not too sweet and is only 6% alcohol, would be great with the orange cake. Two to consider are Ceretto "Santo Stefano" and Michele Chiarlo "Nivole," both about \$16.

Master sommelier Tim Gaiser is a wine consultant who lives in San Francisco.

Popovers

This easy method means golden popovers are perfect for weeknight dinners

BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE

Lost in the drone of a blender during a day of recipe-testing recently, I realized that the technique I was using to make batch after batch of crêpes could easily be applied to popovers. Long a favorite of mine, popovers were always a little too messy and time-consuming to attempt on a busy weeknight—they seemed a better fit with a slow weekend brunch or an elegant roast beef dinner.

While I realize that making popovers in a blender isn't a big deal, it did change my whole attitude about baking them. Using a blender means my prep time is thinned to less than five minutes, with cleanup all but complete by the time the oven is heated. The blender allows me to whiz in a few flavor variations to jazz up the traditional popover. And now popovers work for me as a refreshing change of pace from rolls or bread for the weeknight dinner plate.

With no straining, making popover batter couldn't be easier

I have a difficult time deciding which part of the popover is my favorite: the crisp, buttery exterior or the webbed, custard-like interior. The one thing of which I'm certain is how incredibly easy they are to make. The ingredients (milk, eggs, flour, butter, mustard) are already staples in nearly everyone's pantries, and the master recipe takes only about twenty seconds to combine in a blender. Just slide your empty popover (or muffin) tins into the oven, crank up the heat, blend the batter, pour it into the hot tins, and bake. It's



Popovers tumble right out of the pan, thanks to their buttery, crisp shells.

The author's favorite popover is crisp and brown on the outside, soft and custardy on the inside.



from the Blender

really that simple. The blender makes the batter silky smooth and free of lumps, so there's no need for straining.

For a big puff, start with room-temperature ingredients

As far as I can tell, there are as many different methods for baking popovers as there are cooks with unique taste buds. I've monkeyed around with everything from fluctuating oven temperatures to using all sorts of pans and all sorts of preparations. After all the experimentation, I'm thrilled with my results and steadfast in my method.

Early on in my testing, I did incorporate the advice of a friend into my method. She told me her secret to the puffiest popovers is room-temperature ingredients—and I absolutely agree. In fact, I'd go so far as to say your ingredients must be at room temperature before blending. This way, the batter receives that im-

portant initial burst of oven heat, which ensures the biggest pop. If the batter is cold when it goes into the oven, the heat value is lost on warming it up, and your pop will flop.

Of course, on a busy weeknight, few people have the time or foresight to allow milk or eggs to come to room temperature. Try this: use a microwave oven to melt the butter and to warm the milk. Also, putting the eggs in a bowl of warm water is a good way to warm them up.

A hot and steady oven temperature means crisp, strong popovers

My baking technique, while not unique, delivers terrific puff, a crisp browned exterior, and that lovely custardy interior that I adore. I always begin by putting the pans in the oven and cranking up the heat—to 450°F, to be exact. I leave it this hot for the whole baking time. I know that sounds really high for such delicate creatures as popovers, but they must

No popover pan? Try a muffin tin.

I like deep, nonstick popover pans for spectacular puff—they create towering, high-rise affairs with crusty, well-browned exteriors. As these pans are relatively inexpensive (see Sources, p. 76) and produce great results, they're a good investment. But if you don't have popover pans, use nonstick muffin tins. Popovers made in them will still be buttery and crisp, but just a bit smaller. Just be sure the muffin tins are nonstick, as popovers will stick to aluminum tins no matter how much you grease them.

Blend, pour, and pop in the oven



Blend the batter for about 30 seconds to incorporate all the ingredients.



Spray the hot tins lightly. The tins need only a thin coating of baking spray to prevent sticking.



Fill the greased cups a little more than halfway and quickly pop them in the oven. Don't open the oven door until they're done.



Pierce the popovers to let steam escape, which allows them to maintain their tall stature.

have that quick blast of heat for their lofty puff. Maintaining this high heat creates crisp shells and helps keep the popovers tall and strong once they're out of the oven.

Whatever you do, don't peek

Once the batter has been poured into the hot pans, pop them back into the oven immediately and close the door. As with a soufflé, keep the oven door closed; there can be absolutely no peeking or the popovers might collapse. The popovers also need to bake long enough to set sufficiently. You might be tempted to pull them out of the oven when they reach that golden-brown stage, but let them go for just a minute or two longer, until they darken to a more uniform brown. At this point, they're cooked, but if you like popovers with a dry center, you can turn off the oven and let them sit there for a few more minutes.

Add herbs or cheese for variety

Once I had the popover basics down pat, I discovered that it's easy to riff off the original recipe. Depending on my mood and what I'm serving, I'll blend some chopped herbs or a bit of soft or grated cheese (such as goat cheese or Parmesan) into the popover batter. The herb popovers spice up a plain meal; you can match the selection of herbs to what you're eating. Cheese popovers don't puff quite as high as those made from the master recipe, but their intense flavor is a worthwhile tradeoff.



Add chopped fresh herbs to the batter for an infusion of color and earthy flavor.

HERB

After blending all the ingredients in the master recipe, add $\frac{1}{3}$ cup lightly packed chopped fresh herbs (any combination will do, but my favorite is half chives and half basil), pulse the blender, and continue with the directions.

PARMESAN

Add 2 ounces (about $\frac{2}{3}$ cup) finely grated fresh Parmesan and $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 teaspoon coarsely ground fresh black pepper to the batter along with the flour and proceed according to the directions.

GOAT CHEESE

Start the recipe by putting 4 ounces room-temperature goat cheese in the blender along with about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the milk. Blend until smooth and then proceed with the recipe, using the remaining milk.

Popovers

Be sure to use a nonstick pan, whether it's a muffin tin or a popover pan. The fat content of whole milk or half-and-half gives the popovers body and richness. *Yields ten popovers (in standard popover pans) or twelve popovers (in a muffin tin).*

4 large eggs, at room temperature

$\frac{1}{2}$ cups whole milk or half-and-half, at room temperature

4 Tbs. unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly; more butter for serving

1 Tbs. Dijon mustard

6 oz. ($\frac{1}{2}$ cups) all-purpose flour

$\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. table salt

$\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. cayenne

Pan spray

Arrange an oven rack on the middle rung and slide two popover pans (six 6-oz. cups per pan) or one 12-cup nonstick muffin tin (with $3\frac{1}{2}$ -oz. cups) onto the rack. Heat the oven to 450°F. In a blender, combine the eggs, milk or half-and-half, melted butter, and mustard. Process until blended, about 10 seconds. Add the flour, salt, and cayenne and blend until just combined, another 10 to 15 seconds. Scrape down the sides, if necessary, and set aside the blended mixture while the oven continues to heat.

Once the oven is hot, moving quickly, remove the pans from the oven, set them on a cooling rack or a folded dishtowel, and lightly grease them with the pan spray. Pour the batter evenly into the heated tins (fill each cup one-half to two-thirds of the way full) and immediately slide the pans back into the oven. If you're using popover pans, there will be one empty cup in each pan. If you're using a muffin tin, there should be a little leftover batter. Pour it into a greased 6-oz. custard cup and put it in the oven with the muffin tin (the batter puffs nicely in a custard cup, but the popover may stick to the sides).

Bake without opening the door until the popovers are puffed and well browned, about 25 min. Resist the urge to open the oven door, especially during the first 20 min. of baking—if you do, you're likely to end up with pancakes instead of popovers. If you like drier popovers, turn the oven off after 25 min. and let the popovers sit there for a few more minutes. Pierce each popover with the tip of a knife to let steam escape; this will keep the exterior crisp and the interior moist, and prevent the popovers from collapsing. Gently tip the pan onto a rack and let the popovers tumble out. Serve immediately with lots of butter. Leftovers can be reheated in a 300°F oven until they're warm. They won't retain their super puff or crisp exterior, but they'll still be delicious.

Abigail Johnson Dodge is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦

How to Make a Light, Creamy Pasta Sauce

BY BRUCE WEINSTEIN
& MARK SCARBROUGH

Pasta with cream sauce is a perfect example of how easy—and how liberating—it is to cook without a recipe. Although penne with tomato vodka sauce may seem like a very different dish from spaghetti with curried shrimp and peas, the underlying methods used to make them are exactly the same.

Once you learn a few very simple steps, you can improvise a light, creamy pasta dinner in minutes, without having to refer to stacks of cookbooks to find just the dish you want to make.

No matter what ingredients you use, you just need to know how to control the depth and balance of flavors and the consistency of the sauce. Our simple method will give you that control, whether you're using one of our ideas, making an Italian classic, or cooking your own eclectic combination.



Totally different dishes but all made from the same method. Once you've mastered a few simple steps, you can whip up whatever you feel like eating, without reading a recipe. (See pp. 48–49 for these easy pasta dishes.)

Four steps to a great pasta dinner

Before you start your sauce...



The key to success is prep. You need to wash, chop, and measure all your ingredients before you actually start making the sauce. This includes cooking the pasta itself. Then follow these steps to make the pasta dish of your choice (see some suggested ingredient combinations on pp. 48–49).



Rinse the *al dente* pasta briefly to keep it from clumping. The pasta will be heated again in the sauce, so don't worry about keeping it warm.

The only pasta tip you'll ever need

What's the secret to perfect pasta? Oil in the water? Butter? A little nutmeg? No, the only trick is to use enough water. For a pound of pasta, use 4 quarts of boiling water, with about 2 tablespoons salt; for anything under 1 pound, use 3 quarts water, never less, and 1 ½ tablespoons salt; for anything over a pound, increase the water by 1 quart per ½ pound and the salt by ½ tablespoon per quart. You need enough water so that the pasta moves around in the pot, which lets it cook evenly in the water.

Here's how easy it is to make pasta with a cream sauce: get your ingredients ready, including boiling your pasta; sauté the main ingredients for the dish; add the flavoring and stock; add the cream; and then toss everything together.

Cream is not a dirty word

We had to get that out of the way right up front. Cream is not bad when it's used judiciously; in fact it's lovely and delicious. And you really don't need as much as you might think.

At our neighborhood American-Italian restaurant, we've ordered spaghetti with a mushroom cream sauce and been left wondering if there's any cream left in the kitchen. Truth is, that's no way to make a pasta cream sauce. The point is not the cream, it's the sautéed meat or vegetables and the pasta. In our method, almost half of the volume in the sauce comes from other liquids, like broth, fortified wines, or the juice from canned

tomatoes. This gives the sauce tons of flavor without fat. The ½ to ⅔ cup cream serves as an enrichment to the sauce, not the whole sauce itself.

Get the pasta (and everything else) ready—this sauce moves fast

Always start a cream sauce by boiling the water for the pasta. Cream sauces are so fast that there's no time to make the sauce and the pasta at the same time;

One: Sauté



Sauté your ingredients over lively heat to get them browned and mostly cooked and to start building the layers of flavor. (Be sure the pan and fat are hot before you start.) Each item will need a slightly different time, so add longer-cooking ones first.

the sauce will be done long before the water even comes to a boil. If that happens, the sauce gets cold and has to be reheated—and since it's already reduced, it can thicken too much or the emulsion in the cream can break, leaving pools of butterfat on your sauce.

Be sure the pasta's not too tough, not too mushy. Once, we were learning how to make tagliatelle from an Italian cook in her kitchen. When the noodles were almost done, we thought we'd impress our hostess by being duly authentic. We scooped a strand out of the water and tossed it against the kitchen wall.

"Are you insane?" she yelled. "I just had that painted."

Save your walls. *Al dente* means "to the tooth" in Italian, so use your teeth. Take a noodle or a tube from the water, cool it slightly, and then bite it. It should have some resistance, some chew, a firm bite, but you shouldn't see a white ring or dot in the center of the noodle—that

Two: Flavor



Add flavorings and broth to deglaze the pan and then reduce them by about half to concentrate the flavor; you'll see the bottom of the pan for a second as you scrape your spoon across it. This stage gives the pasta complexity and allows you to use less cream later.

Three: Enrich



Now add the cream, sparingly. You'll use just enough to round out the flavors and create a clingy sauce. Reduce the cream a bit at this stage to mellow the raw cream taste and to thicken the sauce slightly.

Four: Toss



Toss the pasta into the pan, along with the cheese and any other last-minute ingredients. Gently toss to heat the noodles and to meld all the flavors together; be careful not to overcook at this stage or the sauce might break.

means the interior's still uncooked. When the pasta is done, drain it immediately and rinse it to keep it from sticking. Although most cooks prefer not to rinse pasta, we think it's worth the slight loss of flavor to avoid the sticking problem. The pasta will warm again in the sauce, just as the dish comes off the stove.

And feel free to play with shapes. Yes, clam sauce is traditionally served over spaghetti, but you can use angel hair, rigatoni, or even farfalle. To be honest, we usually use whatever's in the pantry.

Get out your heavy sauté pan. We like to use a 5-quart pan with high sides to hold the sautéed ingredients, the pasta, and the sauce all at once. Be sure to choose one with a nice heavy base that doesn't have hot spots. You want even heat for sautéing and then reducing.

You're ready to start when everything is in its place. As with Chinese stir-fries, pasta cream sauces move quickly once you begin cooking, so be

sure all your ingredients are shredded, chopped, diced, or measured before you begin the dish.

One: Sauté your main ingredients lightly—they'll cook more in the sauce

Every good cream sauce begins, not with cream, but with a sautéed main ingredient or two: the base of the dish. Here's where your creativity and mood come into play. Starting with more classic Italian combinations is a good bet—pancetta, mushrooms, and peas; sausage, sage, and sun-dried tomatoes; clams, garlic, and oregano—but there's no need to be conventional. Just about anything that tastes good together will taste great together in a cream sauce. We've listed ingredients for six of our favorite combinations on pp. 48-49 to get you started.

Any meat, poultry, or seafood needs to be browned lightly during this first step, but not totally cooked, because it

will continue to cook as you reduce the liquids. We find that meat and poultry are best cut into thin strips; sausage meat should be removed from its casings. Bacon or pancetta should be diced or minced so it has a chance to thoroughly brown. Be sure all your meat or poultry is well trimmed. Because a pasta cream sauce is made quickly, the fat has no time to render out.

Seafood cooks really quickly, so the pieces can be a bit bigger. Medium or small peeled and deveined shrimp work nicely. Bay scallops impart their briny-sweet flavor very quickly to a cream sauce, so be careful not to sauté them very long, but larger sea scallops should be cut in half. Fresh or frozen lump crabmeat is readily available and quite easy to use, as are canned clams. Fish fillets can flake maddeningly, so it's best to choose a firm fish, such as halibut, salmon, or char. These fish should be cut into one-inch chunks, which won't

Six flavor combinations to get you started

To make a cream pasta, follow the steps on pp. 46–47, using any of the ingredient lists below. Be sure to do all your prep first, including cooking your pasta. All these recipes serve two to three.



Ziti with Mushrooms, Pancetta & Peas

One: Sauté

2 Tbs. olive oil
 ¼ cup finely chopped pancetta
 ¼ cup finely minced onion
 2 cups thinly sliced cremini mushrooms (from about 8 oz. mushrooms)
 ½ cup thawed frozen peas (add these last)

Two: Flavor

1 tsp. chopped fresh thyme (or ½ tsp. dried)
 ¼ cup Madeira or Marsala
 ⅓ cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken or vegetable broth

Three: Enrich

½ to ⅔ cup heavy cream

Four: Toss

8 oz. dried ziti, cooked and drained
 ¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan

Angel Hair Pasta with Garlic & Clam Cream Sauce

One: Sauté

1½ Tbs. unsalted butter
 3 cloves garlic, minced
 2 cans (6½ oz. each) minced clams, drained (about 1½ cups), liquid reserved

Two: Flavor

1 tsp. fresh oregano (or ½ tsp dried)
 ¼ tsp. dried red chile flakes
 ⅓ cup reserved clam juice

Three: Enrich

½ to ⅔ cup heavy cream

Four: Toss

8 oz. dried angel hair pasta, cooked and drained
 ¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan
 ¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley (optional)



Penne with Tomato Vodka Cream Sauce

One: Sauté

2 Tbs. olive oil
 1 small yellow onion, finely chopped
 2 cloves garlic, minced
 2 cups canned crushed tomatoes

Two: Flavor

1 tsp. chopped fresh thyme (or ½ tsp. dried)
 2 tsp. chopped fresh oregano (or ½ tsp. dried)
 ¼ tsp. dried red chile flakes
 ¼ cup vodka
 ⅓ cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken or vegetable broth

Three: Enrich

½ to ⅔ cup heavy cream

Four: Toss

8 oz. dried penne, cooked and drained
 ¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan
 ¼ cup roughly chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley (optional)

turn into a mass of threads as your dish comes together.

For vegetables, the rule is the harder the vegetable, the smaller the pieces. Root vegetables are particularly good with cream sauces, but they need to be cut very small or even shredded first, since they have long cooking times. Broccoli and cauliflower, for example, need to be cut into small florets. We also use the broccoli stems, cut into ½-inch strips, much like matchsticks. Peas, of course, cook fastest, especially if they're frozen.

You should add your ingredients in order of longest to shortest cooking, so the longer-cooking ones can get a head

start. Onions, shallots, or leeks need to be cut or sliced finely and sautéed so they're thoroughly softened and their sweetness has a chance to develop. Chicken or pork would come next, since they must be thoroughly cooked, but if you're using chicken breast meat, take care not to dry it out by overcooking.

How long you sauté each ingredient is all a matter of common sense, but with this caveat: the main ingredient should be slightly undercooked at this point, because it's going to continue cooking with the flavorings and the cream. And be sure to lightly season your ingredients at this stage with salt and pepper so that the flavors have a chance to penetrate.

When you start to sauté, get the pan nice and hot and use just a small amount of oil or butter. If you add too much fat to the dish, it can force the cream to break. But by keeping the butter or oil content low in the first place, you'll actually have a richer, thicker sauce.

Two: Add flavor by reducing liquids into a savory layer

The base has been sautéed, but it's not yet time for the cream. The next step is what makes our sauces so delicious yet

less rich than many. We add and reduce liquids to lay down a layer of deep flavor for the dish and provide some of the volume of the sauce.

We often add spices and herbs right before the liquids, taking care to only gently toast the spices without burning them. As for the liquid, we begin with any wine or spirits that we might be using, so that the alcohol has a chance to evaporate and the sugars in the brandy or whatever can caramelize a bit. Straight wine tends to be overpowered by a cream sauce, but there are other flavorful choices like vodka



Spaghetti with Shrimp in Curry Cream Sauce

One: Sauté

2 Tbs. olive oil or vegetable oil
1 Tbs. minced fresh ginger
¾ lb. small or medium shrimp,
peeled and deveined
½ cup snow peas, cut across into
squares

Two: Flavor

1 Tbs. curry powder
¼ cup dry vermouth
⅓ cup homemade or low-salt canned
vegetable or chicken broth

Three: Enrich

½ to ⅔ cup heavy cream

Four: Toss

8 oz. dried thin spaghetti, cooked
and drained
¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro
2 thinly sliced scallions



Fusilli with Sausage, Sun-Dried Tomatoes & Vermouth Cream Sauce

One: Sauté

1 Tbs. olive oil
12 oz. hot or sweet Italian sausage,
removed from casings and
crumbled
5 oil-packed sun-dried tomato
halves, thinly sliced crosswise

Two: Flavor

2 tsp. chopped fresh sage (or 1 tsp.
dried)
¼ cup sweet red vermouth or
Marsala
⅓ cup homemade or low-salt canned
chicken broth

Three: Enrich

½ to ⅔ cup heavy cream

Four: Toss

8 oz. dried fusilli, cooked and
drained
¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan

(which doesn't have much flavor of its own but helps to "unlock" flavors in other ingredients), vermouth, or Marsala, as well as brandies like Calvados or Armagnac. But remember that if your pan is very hot, liquors may flame; take the pan off the heat source momentarily before adding them, and stand back. If it does ignite, keep your cool and cover the pan to extinguish the flame.

For the rest of the liquid, you can use fish stock, clam juice, or chicken, vegetable, or beef broth, depending on the main ingredient. We use a total of about ½ cup of liquid for two main-course servings. The idea is not to boil the ingredients in the liquid, but rather to reduce

the liquid slightly to let the flavors form a background with the main ingredient.

Three: Finally, enrich the sauce by adding cream—but not too much

The French, those purveyors of all things creamed, have never been ones for raw cream, unless it tops a dessert. For a sauce, they reduce it endlessly, until even the cream is a glaze. We don't take it quite that far. Instead, the cream should reduce slightly so that the sauce has a nice coating consistency but isn't thick. This will take from just a minute up to a few minutes, depending on your pan and your

Rigatoni Normandy

One: Sauté

1½ Tbs. unsalted butter
1 leek (white and light green part
only), sliced in half and very thinly
sliced crosswise, washed, and
drained
6 oz. boneless, skinless chicken
breast, cut into thin strips
½ Granny Smith or Macintosh apple,
peeled, cored, and thinly sliced

Two: Flavor

1 tsp. chopped fresh tarragon (or
½ tsp. dried)
¼ cup brandy or Calvados
⅓ cup homemade or low-salt canned
chicken broth

Three: Enrich

½ to ⅔ cup heavy cream

Four: Toss

8 oz. dried rigatoni, cooked and
drained
¼ cup finely shredded Gruyère or
Emmental cheese

stove. Keep an eye on it: under-reducing the cream will give you a soupy sauce with a raw edge to it, while over-reducing it won't give you enough sauce to coat the pasta well, plus you may break the cream.

Four: Toss well to bring it all together

The final step to a pasta cream sauce is bringing together the cheese (though not every dish even needs cheese), the sauce, and the pasta itself. Add the cheese and the cooked pasta while the pan's still over the heat. Toss both in the pan, stirring so the pasta heats through and the sauce is completely incorporated, and then immediately remove the pan from the heat. Cheese is salty by nature, so wait until the cheese and pasta have been tossed in the sauce to do your final seasoning. If you're using any fresh herbs as a final garnish, sprinkle them on now. And serve immediately—remember, reheating is not good for cream sauces.

Bruce Weinstein and Mark Scarbrough are the creators of The Ultimate cookbook series, which includes The Ultimate Shrimp Book. ♦

High Heat Adds Zip to Cauliflower

I love cauliflower. Its subtle nature presents a world of possibilities to the creative cook. But it has to be cooked correctly and combined with the right flavors.

For inspiration, I tend to look to the Mediterranean, where this vegetable originated (cauliflower later became a staple in northern Europe, where it thrives as a cold-weather, frost-resistant crop). This may come as a surprise to those who know cauliflower only through cheese-laden casseroles or bland puréed soups. But I find that the bold, vibrant flavors of Mediterranean cuisine are the perfect counterpoint to cauliflower's mild manners.

Keep it out of hot water

For the most part, I prefer roasting cauliflower to boiling or steaming because the high, dry heat concentrates the flavor, adds nuttiness, and encourages caramelization, which increases the complexity of the flavor. Sautéing is another favorite method; it delivers similar results to roasting. I often roast more than I plan to eat, saving the leftovers to toss with a quick vinaigrette the next day. (For easy roasting instructions and ideas for adding great flavor, see the sidebar on p. 52.)

Boiling or steaming tends to bring out the one-dimensional, cabbagey side of cauliflower, and it doesn't help to eliminate the water that cauliflower is so full of. If you do find that you need very simply cooked cauliflower for part of a recipe, I suggest steaming rather than boiling, because at least the cauliflower won't absorb more water.

For many cooks, cauliflower's awkward shape can pose a challenge. This, too, has a solution. After trimming back the leaves, I use the tip of my small chef's knife (a sturdy, sharp paring knife will also do) to cut around the main stem and free as many large branches as possible. I then follow the growth pattern along the stem of each floret, severing smaller branches as opposed to just slicing through the floret. In fact, I never cut directly through the "flower." I like to preserve the natural, curving form of the florets by cutting through the stem part of the buds

Bring out the best in this surprisingly versatile vegetable by roasting and sautéing

BY PETER HOFFMAN





Author Peter Hoffman selects cauliflower at the Union Square Greenmarket in New York City.

At the market

When shopping for a head of cauliflower, don't walk away if you can't find one that's perfectly white and blemish-free. Yellow spots on the florets only mean that the vegetable got a little "sunburn"—the cauliflower's leaves didn't fully wrap themselves over the florets during growth. Sometimes cauliflower will have brown or grayish spots on the florets as well. That's a small mold that's just fine to slice away, according to the University of California at Davis Vegetable Research and Information Center. Most important, look for heads of cauliflower that are firm and not limp.



Photos: top, Sarah Jiv; all others, Scott Phillips

Trim through the trunk. Preserve the shape of the florets by wedging a knife between the smaller stems (not cutting through the buds) and then snapping them apart.

and then snapping them apart.

Once you cut into a head of cauliflower, you don't need to cook it all. One of its great features is that, uncooked, it seems to keep forever. Even for my family of four, one head of cauliflower goes a long way and, invariably, part of it ends up in the crisper, sometimes to linger for days. At a moment's notice, I can trim off a few florets for a salad or pasta recipe. So don't feel guilty about that half a cauliflower kicking around your fridge. Just cut off a bit when the urge arises.

RECIPES

Gratin of Sautéed Cauliflower, Tomato, Pine Nuts & Saffron

Inspired by the flavors of Sicily, this side dish is my answer to the usual smothered-in-cheese gratin. I like to serve this with braised lamb and a simple, hearty salad. *Serves five.*

¼ cup pine nuts

4 slices firm white sandwich bread, toasted and crusts trimmed

6 Tbs. olive oil

2 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

1 small head cauliflower (about 2 lb.), cut into medium florets (about ¾ inch at the widest point)

Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

1 medium onion, chopped

1 large pinch saffron (about 25 threads)

1 cup canned crushed tomatoes

¼ cup dried currants

In a small, dry skillet, toast the pine nuts over medium-low heat, shaking the pan frequently, until fragrant and lightly toasted, about 2 min. Transfer to a small bowl.

Tear the toasted bread slices into bite-size pieces and put them in a food processor. Process until you have coarse crumbs, about 30 seconds. Transfer to a small bowl, drizzle with 3 Tbs. of the olive oil, mix well, and toss with 1 Tbs. of the chopped parsley.

Heat the oven to 375°F. In a 12-inch skillet (preferably ovenproof), heat 2 Tbs. of the olive oil over medium heat. Add the cauliflower and sauté until it begins to soften, about 5 min. Season with salt and pepper and continue sautéing until the cauliflower is deep golden brown and tender but still firm, another 7 to 10 min. Transfer the cauliflower to a small bowl.

Add the remaining 1 Tbs. olive oil to the skillet, still over medium heat. Add the onion and sauté until golden brown, 5 to 8 min. Add the saffron and stir to combine. Add the tomatoes and currants and simmer over medium-low heat until the sauce thickens and the currants plump, about 5 min. Remove from the heat and fold in the cauliflower, pine nuts, and remaining 1 Tbs. parsley. If the skillet isn't ovenproof,

transfer the mixture to a 9x9-inch shallow baking dish or a medium gratin dish.

Sprinkle the cauliflower with the breadcrumbs. Bake to heat through and meld flavors, 15 to 20 min. Serve hot.

Roasted Cauliflower Salad with Green Peppercorn Vinaigrette

The piquant green peppercorns in the vinaigrette are a zippy counterpoint to the cool and neutral cauliflower. Look for brined green peppercorns in the condiment section of your supermarket near the olives. *Serves six.*

1 small head cauliflower (about 2 lb.), cut into medium florets (about ¾ inch at the widest point)
½ cup plus 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 tsp. minced shallot
¼ cup dry white wine
⅓ cup white-wine vinegar
4 tsp. brined green peppercorns
1 tsp. Dijon mustard
1 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
1 cup thinly sliced radicchio (the slices should look like shredded paper)
2 cups frisée, leaves separated and torn into bite-size pieces

Roast the cauliflower—Heat the oven to 400°F. On a jellyroll pan or rimmed baking sheet, toss the cauliflower, 2 Tbs. of the olive oil, salt, and pepper. Roast on the lowest rack, turning with a spatula every 10 min., until the cauliflower is tender and golden brown, 25 to 35 min. Let cool.

Make the salad—Put the shallots, wine, 3 Tbs. of the vinegar, and 2 tsp. of the green peppercorns in a small pan. Over medium heat, boil the liquid until it

reduces to 2 Tbs. Pour into a food processor. Add the mustard and remaining 2 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. vinegar, and then process until the shallot is puréed and the peppercorns are in small bits. With the processor on, slowly add the remaining ½ cup oil. Transfer the mixture to a bowl and stir in the parsley and the remaining 2 tsp. peppercorns by hand. Season to taste with salt.

In a large bowl or on a serving platter, toss the cauliflower, radicchio, and frisée with enough vinaigrette to lightly coat. Season with salt and pepper and drizzle on more dressing to taste.

Creamy Roasted Garlic Soup with Sautéed Cauliflower & Fresh Herbs

I often serve this thick and intense soup with a swirl of herb butter along with the fresh herb garnish. To make this, mix equal parts softened butter and chopped sorrel leaves, a small amount of finely chopped chives, and salt to taste. It brings a fresh note to the soup. *Serves four.*

FOR THE SOUP:

4 heads garlic, loose, papery skins removed and ¼ inch of the tops cut off to expose cloves
5 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
½ tsp. coarse salt; more to taste
½ cup chopped onion
1 leek (white and light green parts only), chopped and well rinsed
2 large boiling potatoes, peeled and chopped
1 Tbs. fresh thyme, chopped
½ cup dry white wine
4 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken or vegetable broth
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
¼ cup chopped fresh sorrel leaves or chives, or a combination

Roast cauliflower for the best flavor

Roasting is an ideal way to prepare cauliflower. It's simple and quick, requiring little attention and cooking in about 30 minutes. And the high, dry heat of the oven yields golden-brown, crisp-tender florets with an accent on the sweet, nutty essence of this vegetable—not its sulfurous, cabbagey traits. Roasted cauliflower, seasoned with a little salt and pepper, makes a great vegetable side dish as is. But tossed with just a few basic ingredients, a simple dish becomes exceptional. Try some of the ingredient combinations at right.

To roast cauliflower, cut a small head into florets that are about the



same size and toss with 2 tablespoons olive oil, salt, and pepper; spread on a rimmed baking sheet. Roast in a 400°F oven on the lowest rack, turning every 10 minutes, until golden brown and crisp-tender, 25 to 35 minutes.

After roasting, toss with delicious accents

- ◆ Fresh lemon juice, minced fresh rosemary, and chopped capers.
- ◆ Orange zest, minced fresh parsley, and sun-dried tomatoes (oil-packed, drained, and chopped).
- ◆ Pitted, chopped kalamata olives, dried red chile flakes, and bitter greens, such as endive, radicchio, or broccoli raab (chopped into bite-size pieces and tossed with the roasted cauliflower in the pan while still hot).
- ◆ Mustard vinaigrette (Dijon mustard, white-wine vinegar, and extra-virgin olive) and minced fresh thyme.
- ◆ Crumbled blue cheese and caraway seeds.
- ◆ Minced shallots, minced fresh tarragon, and grated lemon zest.



More than a garnish. Sautéed cauliflower florets add a delicate, nutty flavor that plays off this creamy, robust roasted garlic soup.

FOR THE CAULIFLOWER:

2 Tbs. olive oil

1 small head cauliflower (2 lb.), cut into small florets (about ½ inch at the widest point)

Make the soup—Heat the oven to 375°F. Put the garlic heads in a small baking pan. Drizzle on 2 Tbs. of the olive oil and sprinkle on the salt. Add 2 Tbs. water to the pan, cover with foil, and roast until a squeezed clove yields a soft purée, 30 to 45 min. When cool, squeeze the pulp from each clove.

In a soup pot over low heat, sweat the onion and leek in 1 Tbs. of olive oil until very soft but not brown, about 10 min. Add the potatoes and thyme and cook another 1 min. Turn the heat to medium high, add the wine, and let it reduce to just a few teaspoons, about 4 min. Add the broth; bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for 10 min. Add the garlic pulp and simmer until the potatoes are very soft, another 15 to 20 min.

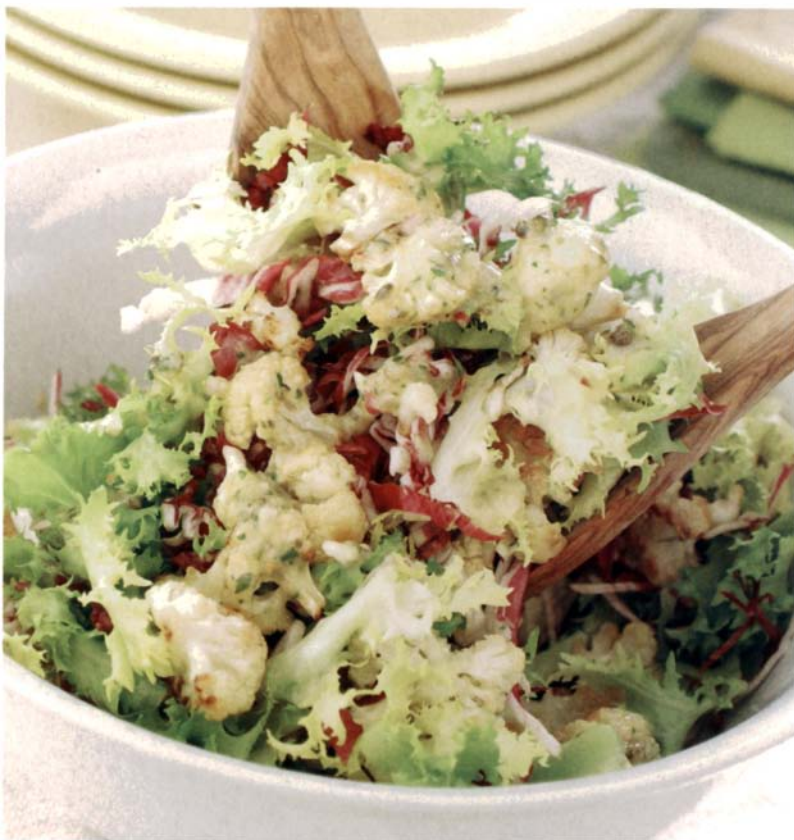
Strain the soup, saving both the liquid and solids. In a blender or food processor, purée the solids in batches, using some liquid to help it blend, and pour the puréed solids back in the pot. When all the solids are puréed, add as much of the remaining liquid as necessary to get a consistency like heavy cream. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Sauté the cauliflower—Heat 2 Tbs. oil in a large sauté pan over medium heat. Add the cauliflower florets and sauté. Once they begin to soften, after about 5 min., season with salt and pepper. Continue to sauté until the cauliflower is deep golden brown and tender but still firm, another 7 to 10 min.

To serve—Reheat the soup. Ladle it into individual bowls, add the cauliflower, and garnish with the sorrel or chives.



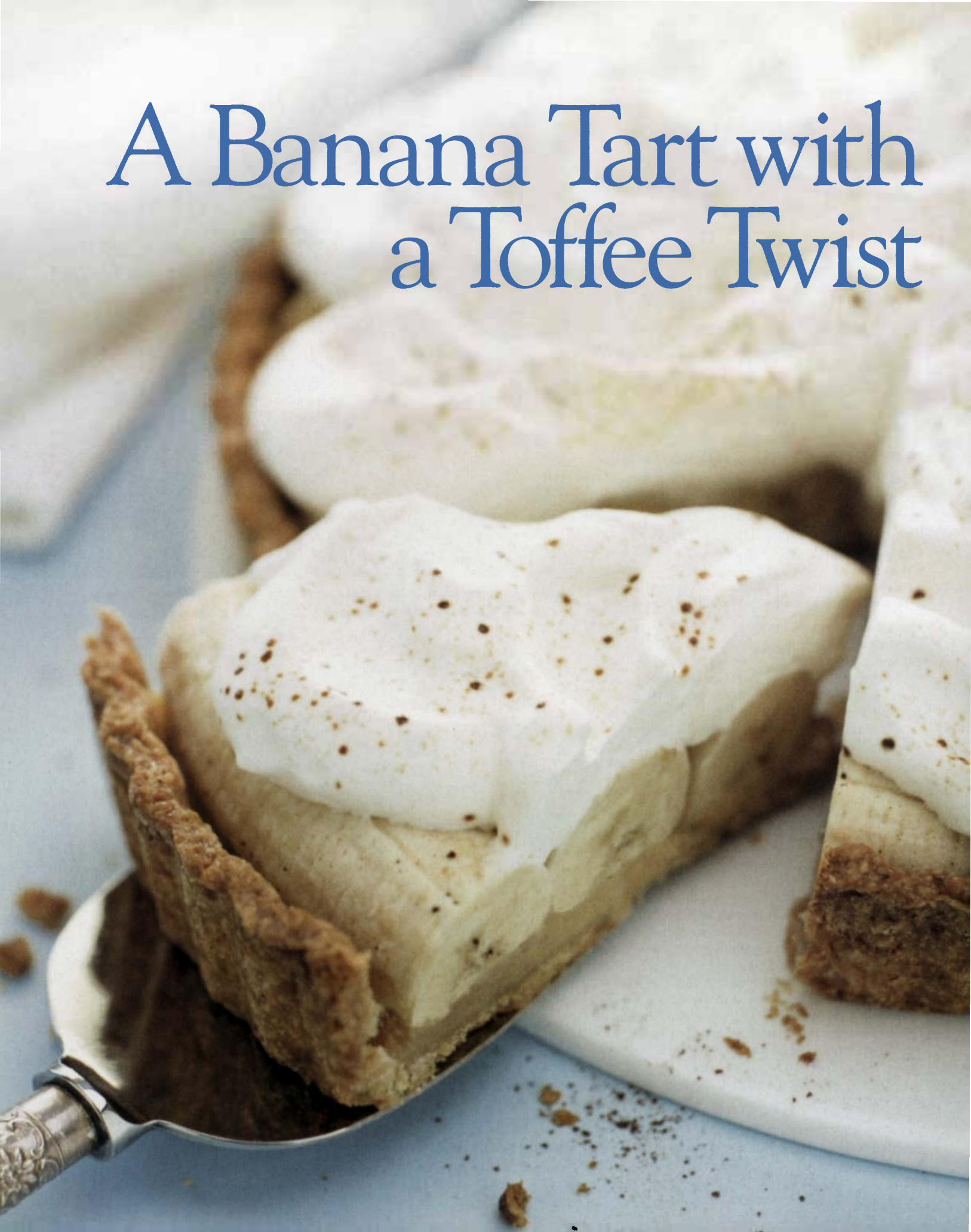
Oven-crisped breadcrumbs create a crunchy layer. Underneath, sautéed cauliflower bakes with tomatoes and pine nuts in a Mediterranean gratin.



Roasted cauliflower adds body to this light, fresh salad. Try serving it instead of potatoes with a seared steak or roasted chicken.

Peter Hoffman is the chef-owner of Savoy in New York City. ♦

A Banana Tart with a Toffee Twist



Layers of caramel toffee, bananas, and whipped cream, all on a cookie-like crust, make a great tart called “banoffee”

BY MARYELLEN DRISCOLL

As so many unexpected love connections are now made, I became hooked on this tart while surfing the Web.

It was this time of year, when my supermarket offers little more than citrus and bananas for fresh fruit. I was in search of a banana-something—anything—just-make-it-different recipe. That’s when I came to www.banoffee.demon.co.uk, an entire web site “dedicated to the best pudding in the world” (“pudding” means dessert in the U.K.). And what a dessert it is, with its rich caramel base, banana midriff, and lofty whipped cream crown.

While the Hungry Monk restaurant in Sussex, England, lays claim to “inventing” banoffee (pronounced bah-NAW-fee) back in 1971, this dessert has

evolved over the years. I’ve tried the Hungry Monk’s recipe, and it’s good. But I’ll modestly argue that if you follow my recipe here, you’ll not only get better results, but you also won’t have to risk sacrificing your life in the process (read on about the “toffee”).

Under that billowy cream lie three layers of flavor and texture

Starting at the bottom of the banoffee is a thick, cookie-like crust that’s crisp-tender—the type that gently but decisively snaps under the pressure of a fork. Spread across it is a gooey, caramel-like foundation, which the British would call “toffee”—hence the name: banana + toffee = banoffee.

Next on deck is a single layer of banana halves that covers the caramel layer in snug, concentric circles. The bananas, caramel, and crisp pastry crust are then covered in a downy shroud of whipped cream, barely sweetened, to counter the caramel spread. Finally, a scant measurement of powdered instant coffee is sprinkled on top. Immediately dissolving into the cream, it lends a breath of roasted bitterness that nudges this immodest dessert toward at least appearing adult.

Making the “toffee” filling is slow but easy

The Hungry Monk’s method for the toffee is chancy (though it’s no secret; the method is similar to recipes

Skip the rolling pin. This dough is so tender that author Maryellen Driscoll presses it out by hand.

Banoffee starts with a crisp, tender crust



The five-second pulse: cut the butter into the flour with five quick pulses of the food processor.

Keep it crumbly. Add the yolk and cream, blend for ten more seconds, and the dough will look like coarse meal.

Pat and press in a bowl until the mixture forms a cohesive ball.





Lay down the toffee. A can of sweetened condensed milk is all that's needed to make this caramel-like filling.

I've seen for making *dulce de leche* or *cajeta*, a type of caramel used in Latin American cooking). Here's how the recipe reads: immerse two unopened cans of sweetened condensed milk into boiling water, cover, and boil for five hours. But take note of the caution that follows: never let the pot of water boil dry or the cans will explode "causing a grave risk to life, limb, and kitchen ceilings." Scary.

Regardless, I tried it. But in addition to the worry, I didn't care for this quirky method because I couldn't monitor the progress of the caramel in the sealed cans. I cooked mine for just four hours and found the caramel had gone too far.

After that, I tried pouring the sweetened condensed milk into a saucepan and cooking it directly over the heat. This required constant attention, and



Plump up the whipped cream. Spoon it on, lifting up some of the cream as you pull the spoon away.

the milk still tended to cook too fast, becoming pocked with burnt sugar nuggets. I've since developed a method of cooking the milk in a double boiler (by the way, I only use one can; two make my teeth ache). It's about a three-hour process. But it requires almost no attention other than to check the water level and give it a stir about every 45 minutes.

The best crust is a short, snappy one

Really, if there's any cooking challenge to this dessert, it's the crust. I've seen a number of recipes that try to shortcut this step by making a crumb crust with crushed graham crackers. But I found that making this particular crust is easy enough, and better.

First off, I keep the mixing process as simple as counting. It's not like a flaky crust, in which you have to judiciously cut the butter into the flour mixture and never overmix. Nor do you want to blend the butter so thoroughly into the flour that it's no longer recognizable, as many short crusts require. To keep my crust tender and even a bit flaky, I like to negotiate between the two techniques. I pulse the food processor so that the butter gets cut in but is still recognizable; there should even be some pieces still the size of peas. Then, when I pour in the cream and egg yolk, I process just enough to blend without having the dough come together. It should still be crumbly. But if you do overprocess the butter, you're still safe. The fat from the cream and the egg yolk not only adds richness but also helps to minimize gluten formation, which would otherwise toughen the crust. The sugar also helps to inhibit gluten.

In fact, this dough is so remarkably tender that it's easier to press it out into the pan than to roll it. This is good news since most short crust recipes require a one- to two-hour rest in the refrigerator before the dough can handle being rolled out. An

Tips for making banoffee ahead

Up to three days ahead

- ◆ Make the caramel; cover tightly and refrigerate.

One day ahead

- ◆ Bake the crust; once cooled, wrap tightly in plastic wrap or an extra-large zip-top bag.

A few hours before serving

- ◆ Reheat the caramel in a double boiler (or in a heatproof bowl over simmering water) just long enough to soften; spread the caramel in the crust; cover tightly with plastic wrap.
- ◆ Whip the cream to soft peaks; transfer to a large mesh sieve set over a bowl to catch any liquid that settles; chill, uncovered.
- ◆ Put the coffee granules in a small zip-top bag.

Right before serving

- ◆ Slice the bananas and arrange on top of the caramel.
- ◆ Spoon on the whipped cream.
- ◆ Crush the coffee granules with a rolling pin and sprinkle on top.

added bonus to pressing it out with your fingers is that an extra thickness of dough tends to build up along the crease where the pan sides meet the base. This helps fortify the sides so that they're less apt to slip down during baking.

From there on it's merely a matter of slicing bananas, whipping the cream, sprinkling on crushed coffee granules, and serving your guests.

RECIPE

Banoffee

For tips on how to make this dessert in advance, see the sidebar at bottom left. If you don't have a tart pan with a removable bottom, use a 9-inch springform pan. *Serves twelve.*

1 can (14 oz.) sweetened condensed milk (preferably Eagle Brand)
6 oz. (1½ cups) all-purpose flour
¼ cup plus 2 tsp. sugar
½ tsp. salt
4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into ¾-inch dice and chilled well
1 pint (2 cups) heavy cream
1 large egg yolk
½ tsp. vanilla extract
4 ripe bananas
¼ tsp. instant coffee granules

Make the toffee—Fill the base pan of a double boiler (or a medium saucepan) halfway with water. Bring to a boil and then reduce heat to medium for an active simmer (just shy of a boil). Pour the sweetened condensed milk into the double boiler's top insert (or into a stainless-steel bowl that fits snugly on top of the saucepan) and set over the simmering water. Every 45 min., check the water level in the pot and give the milk a stir. Replenish with more hot water as needed. Once the milk has thickened to the consistency of pudding and has turned a rich, dark caramel color, 2½ to 3 hours, remove from the heat, cool, and cover.

Make the crust—Meanwhile, combine the flour, ¼ cup of the sugar, and salt in a food processor. Pulse to combine. Add the butter pieces and gently toss to lightly coat with flour. Blend the butter and flour mixture with about five 1-second pulses (count "one one-thousand" with each pulse) or until the mixture is the texture of coarse meal with some of the butter pieces the size of peas. In a small bowl, whisk together 2½ Tbs. of the cream and the egg yolk and pour this over the flour mixture. Process continuously until the mixture turns golden in color and thickens in texture yet is still crumbly, about 10 seconds.

Transfer the mixture to a medium-large bowl and press the mixture together with your hand until it comes together into a ball. Shape the dough into an 8-inch-wide disk and put it in the center of an 8½- to 9-inch fluted tart pan with a removable bottom. Beginning in the center of the dough and working out toward the edges, use your fingertips to gently press the dough evenly into the bottom and up the pan sides. The edges should be flush with the top edge of the pan. If you find a spot that's especially thick, pinch



away some of the dough and use it to bulk up a thin spot. Cover with plastic wrap and freeze for 1 hour.

Bake the crust—Heat the oven to 400°F. Right before baking, line the dough with aluminum foil and cover with pie weights or dried beans. Bake on the lower oven rack for 20 min. Carefully lift the foil (along with the weights) out of the tart pan, lower the oven temperature to 375°F, and bake until the crust is deep golden brown, about 15 min. Transfer the tart pan to a wire rack to cool to room temperature.

Assemble the tart—Spread the caramel over the crust using a rubber spatula or offset spatula. If the caramel has cooled and is too firm to spread easily, re-heat it over simmering water in the double boiler until loosened but not hot. Slice each banana in half lengthwise and arrange the halves on top of the caramel in a circular pattern. To fit the banana halves snugly in the center of the pan, cut them into smaller lengths.

Put the coffee granules in a small zip-top bag. Press a rolling pin back and forth over the granules to crush them into a powder.

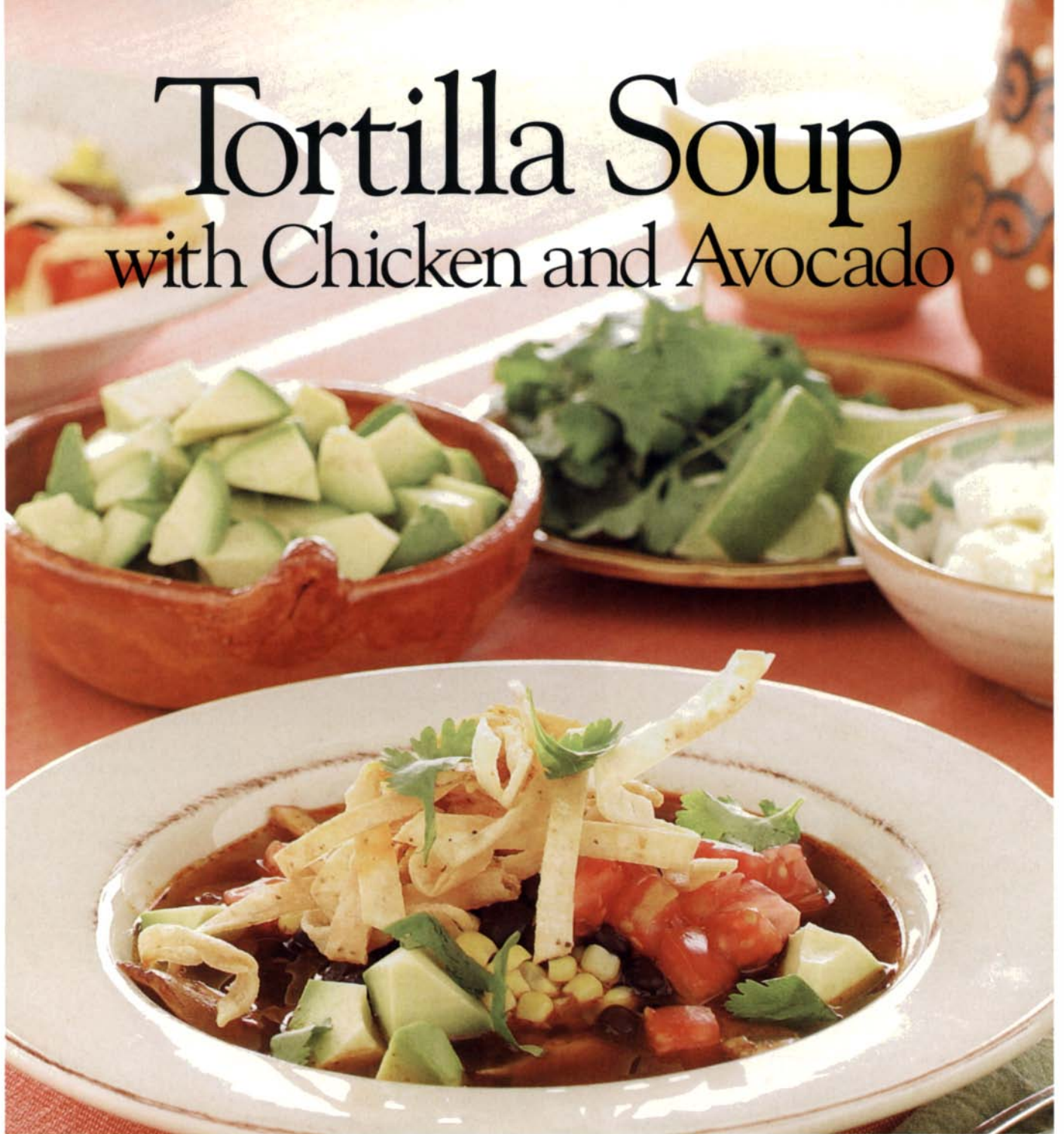
In a chilled medium stainless-steel mixing bowl, beat the remaining heavy cream, the vanilla, and the remaining 2 tsp. sugar with an electric mixer at medium-high speed until it holds soft peaks when the beaters are lifted. (If you overbeat the cream, fold in 1 Tbs. cream to relax it.) Spoon the whipped cream over the bananas, sprinkle with the coffee powder, remove the pan sides, and serve immediately. The tart can be held for 30 min. in the refrigerator, though it's best not to sprinkle on the coffee powder until just before serving.

The final touch:
a sprinkling of
crushed coffee
granules to melt
into the cream.

Maryellen Driscoll is an editor-at-large for Fine Cooking. ♦

Tortilla Soup

with Chicken and Avocado



A tangle of crunchy corn tortilla strips and a mildly spicy broth make this easy-to-assemble soup a surprise hit

BY MARTHA HOLMBERG

I make this fun and satisfying soup with a quick and flavorful broth that's not traditional but is extremely tasty. For many traditional Mexican soups, making the broth involves toasting, soaking, and puréeing dried chiles, which gives a fantastic depth of flavor but takes some time (and you have to shop for chiles). My broth is based on a paste of minced onion, tomato paste, and ordinary chili powder from the grocery store, along with canned chicken broth. The broth picks up a bit more intensity from the chicken thighs that are the main ingredient in the soup.

Photos: Scott Phillips

Chicken & Tortilla Soup

Be sure the broth is very hot so that it heats up the ingredients in the bowl and offers a strong contrast with the cool, smooth chunks of avocado. The spice level is very low—just a slight chile warmth—so if you prefer more of a kick, add more chili powder or use a hotter powder. This recipe is easily doubled. *Serves two as a light main course or substantial first course.*

- 1 Tbs. vegetable or olive oil, plus another ½ to 1 cup for frying the tortillas**
- ¼ cup finely chopped onion (from about ½ small onion)**
- 1 Tbs. chili powder; more to taste**
- 1 Tbs. tomato paste**
- 2 skinless chicken thighs (bone-in or boneless)**
- Salt to taste**
- 4 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth (I use Pacific brand)**
- Fresh cilantro: six 2-inch stems for the broth, plus ¼ cup roughly chopped leaves for the garnish**
- 4 fresh corn tortillas, 6 inches across, cut into ¼-inch-wide strips**
- ½ cup corn kernels (canned is fine)**
- ½ cup canned black beans, rinsed and drained**
- ¾ cup diced fresh tomato**

FOR THE GARNISH:

- 1 ripe avocado, diced and tossed with a squeeze of lime juice**
- ¼ cup crumbled queso fresco, feta, or ricotta salata**
- 2 dollops sour cream**
- Lime wedges for serving**

Put 1 Tbs. of the oil in a large saucepan or small soup pot, add the onion, and cook over medium heat until the onion has softened but not browned, about 3 min. Add the chili powder and tomato paste and stir with a wooden spoon to mix and cook briefly; take care not to let the chili powder scorch.

Season the chicken thighs lightly with salt and nestle them in the chile paste, turning them once so they're entirely coated. Pour in about ½ cup of the broth and adjust the heat to a simmer. Cover the pan and cook the chicken, turning once, until it's extremely tender when pierced with a knife, 30 to 40 min. (add a little more broth if the pan is drying out). When the chicken's done, remove it from the pan, let it cool a bit, and cut or shred it into bite-size pieces, discarding any bones and bits of fat or gristle; set aside.

If there's any visible grease in the pan, spoon it off, add the remaining broth and the cilantro stems and simmer,

uncovered, until the broth has reduced by about one-third and is quite flavorful, 20 to 30 min.

While the broth is reducing, fry the tortillas; see the sidebar below.

Divide the shredded chicken, the corn, black beans, tomato, and tortilla strips between two large soup or pasta bowls. Reheat the broth if necessary so it's piping hot and pour it over the ingredients in the bowls. Serve immediately, and let each diner add the avocado, cheese, sour cream, chopped cilantro, and a big squeeze of lime juice at the table.

RIB-EYE VERSION:

Instead of the chicken thighs, use an 8-oz. rib-eye or other tender cut of beef. Trim all the fat and silverskin and cut the meat into bite-size strips, slightly more than ¼ inch thick. Toss the steak with a little salt. Start the recipe by heating the 1 Tbs. oil until quite hot, add the steak, and stir-fry it to brown the outside. The meat will cook more in the broth, but if you like your meat medium or well done, continue cooking it a few more minutes at this point. Remove the meat from the pan and reserve. Continue with the recipe above, skipping the chicken, of course.

Cook the crispy strips

Line a plate or tray with two layers of paper towels. In a small, high-sided saucepan, heat enough oil to come to about a 1-inch depth. Heat the oil over medium heat; when it reaches 375°F or when a strip of tortilla sizzles immediately when dipped in the oil, add six to eight strips of tortilla. With tongs or a long fork, "scrunch" them for a second or two so they take on a wavy shape (photo, near right). Fry until the strips aren't bubbling much and have become pale brown (photo, far right), about 1 min. Transfer to the paper towels. Repeat with the remaining strips.



My method for cooking the thighs keeps the meat juicy and keeps more of the meaty flavor in the chicken itself rather than leaching it all out into the broth. I dredge the thighs in the chili paste, arrange them in the pan and then add just enough chicken broth to moisten the mixture. I then cover the pan and barely simmer the chicken until it's extremely tender and falling off the bone. The chile paste seeps into the meat and makes it even more savory.

The striking thing about this soup, of course, is the tangle of crisp corn tortilla strips that fills the

bowl. The strips add a musty-sweet corn taste and a great mix of textures: the sections that are under the broth become soaked and slightly chewy, almost like husky noodles, while those on the high ground stay very crunchy, like a good tortilla chip. And speaking of chips—we actually tested this soup using plain tortilla chips and it wasn't half bad. So if you're in a pinch and have all the ingredients except for fresh corn tortillas, go ahead!

Martha Holmberg is Fine Cooking's editor-in-chief. ♦

Enjoying Grains

As versatile as pasta, grains bring nutty flavor and great texture to salads, pilafs, soups, and risotto

BY JOYCE GOLDSTEIN

Many great grains are too often misunderstood as being healthy but too difficult and time-consuming to cook. So they sit on the pantry shelf, in the shadow of the all-too-familiar white rice.

Not in my kitchen. On winter days, I frequently reach for farro, my newest favorite grain, to add to a nourishing bean soup, or barley for a rich mushroom risotto. Grains are at the heart of some of my favorite comfort dishes. When cooked just right, they have an appealing, chewy texture. Their low-key flavor—slightly sweet, somewhat nutty—makes them the perfect backdrop for more assertive ingredients, such as sun-dried tomatoes, warm spices, and fresh herbs.

With all grains, texture is key. Most grains should be cooked until they're tender but still have some toothiness. Beyond this stage, they become mushy or begin to fall apart. But getting the right texture is no more difficult than cooking pasta. Just taste and test the grains as they simmer in water or stock. When they've got that perfect *al dente* texture, drain any excess liquid.

There's just one catch to cooking with grains: their cooking time can vary unpredictably. Barley, for instance, might take 20 or up to 45 minutes. One factor that accounts for this is the grain's age. As grains sit on the shelf, their starch network becomes tighter, and so they need more cooking time to get tender.

Your best bet for finding fresh grains is to buy from a source with high turnover (see Sources, p. 76). Also, buy small quantities so the grains don't hang around too long. Stored in airtight containers in a dry, dark, cool place, most grains will keep for up to a year.

On the following pages, I've profiled four easy-to-cook grains. Each profile includes one delicious "starter" recipe, which I'm sure will convince you that there's much more to grains than good health.



Photos: Mark Thomas



Barley

Barley is probably the oldest grain on the planet. It has a mild sweetness and, when cooked properly, a chewy but tender texture. Barley soup is standard diner fare, but this grain is also an excellent candidate for a creamy risotto or a simple pilaf.

Buying tips

Pearled barley is the most widely available—you'll find it in the supermarket—and the easiest to cook. It has been abraded many times to remove the tough outer husk, and this lightens it to a buff color. Some varieties are white because all the bran and fiber have been polished off, which means it's less nutritious. Brownish-gray whole-grain barley (also called hulled barley) is less widely available. You'll most likely find it in a specialty or natural-foods store.

Cooking basics

Soaking pearled barley in water for a few hours or overnight will shorten the cooking time but isn't required. Whole-grain barley, however, does require an overnight soak and may need longer cooking.

Use 1 part barley to about 3 parts liquid. Bring the barley to a boil in salted water or broth, reduce to a simmer, and cook until tender but toothy. Cooking time ranges from 30 to 60 minutes. For a creamier consistency, gradually add hot liquid in small increments, adding more as the grain absorbs the liquid and stirring all the while, as shown in the risotto recipe at right.

Try barley in a mushroom

"risotto." It cooks just like a rice risotto but has a nuttier, richer flavor.

RECIPE

Barley Risotto with Mushrooms & Gremolata

When cooked as a risotto, barley develops a rich and creamy consistency. The parsley, lemon, and garlic garnish is a fresh, simple accent to the risotto's nutty, robust flavors. *Serves six as a side dish, four as a main course.*

FOR THE GREMOLATA:

1/3 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
2 Tbs. grated lemon zest
1 Tbs. finely chopped garlic

FOR THE BARLEY RISOTTO:

1 oz. dried porcini mushrooms, rinsed
1 cup hot water
2 Tbs. olive oil
1 lb. assorted fresh mushrooms, sliced 1/4 inch thick
2 tsp. coarse salt; more to taste
Freshly ground black pepper
6 to 7 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken or vegetable broth
3 Tbs. unsalted butter
1 small onion, finely chopped
2 cups pearled barley

To make the gremolata—In a small bowl, mix together the parsley, lemon zest, and garlic.

To make the risotto—Soak the porcini in the hot water for at least 30 min. Strain the liquid through a fine sieve and reserve. Chop the porcini into small pieces.

In a large sauté pan with straight sides, heat the oil over high heat until shimmering but not smoking. Sauté the sliced fresh mushrooms until they release some liquid and are browned, about 5 min. Stir in the porcini and the reserved liquid, scraping up any browned bits. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Transfer the mushrooms and liquid to a bowl.

In a saucepan, bring the broth to a boil, reduce the heat, partially cover, and hold at a simmer.

In the pan used for the mushrooms, melt the butter over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until tender and translucent, 8 to 10 min. Add 2 tsp. coarse salt and the barley, and stir until the grains are coated with butter. Add 1 cup of the hot broth, reduce the heat to low, and stir frequently until the broth is absorbed. Stir in another cup of broth. Once it's absorbed, add 1 more cup, stirring until it's also absorbed. Add 2 more cups and simmer the barley, stirring frequently, until it softens but isn't completely tender and the liquid is almost absorbed, about 10 min. Stir in the cooked mushrooms and their liquid and 1 to 2 more cups of broth. Simmer until the barley is tender, about 10 min. more, stirring frequently and adding hot water or broth if needed. The total cooking time for the barley can range from 30 to 60 min.

Stir in the gremolata and adjust the seasonings to taste. Serve hot.



Bulgur

A staple in Middle Eastern kitchens, bulgur is made from whole wheatberries that have been steamed, hulled, dried, and cracked. Because it's already cooked, it only requires rehydrating and no further cooking to serve. Its flavor is wheaty, its texture crunchy-tender. Try serving it hot as a pilaf with lentils and warm spices, cold in salads like tabbouleh, combined with chickpeas for a side dish or stuffing, or mixed with ground beef or lamb.

Bulgur is ready in just 15 minutes, which is all the time you need to prepare the rest of this fresh-tasting, Mediterranean-inspired salad.

Buying tips

Bulgur comes in several grinds. A fine or medium grind is good for salads and baked goods, and medium or

coarse grinds are better for pilafs or stuffings. Bulgur can go rancid quickly, so buy small amounts and use it within a couple of months. If you don't find it in your supermarket, look for it in natural-foods stores and Middle Eastern groceries. Sometimes bulgur is incorrectly labeled as cracked wheat. The two look alike and are sometimes interchangeable in recipes, but cracked wheat isn't precooked, and it needs about 15 minutes of simmering to get tender.

Cooking basics

No soaking is necessary since bulgur is already cooked. To reconstitute it, put the bulgur in a heatproof bowl and pour boiling salted water over it, using 1 part bulgur to 1 to 2 parts water. The bulgur should absorb the liquid and fluff up in 15 to 60 minutes, depending on the coarseness of the grind (finer grinds take less time). If there's excess water once the bulgur is tender, drain it. Let the grains rest for 10 or 20 minutes to help them dry out and separate and then fluff with a fork.

RECIPE

Bulgur & Chickpea Salad with Sun-Dried Tomatoes, Feta & Mint

The freshness of herbs, the tang of feta, and the intensity of sun-dried tomatoes give wheaty bulgur a bright boost. And the grain's crunchy-tender texture makes it a satisfying, quick side dish, ideal for serving alongside pan-seared or grilled lamb chops. In the summertime, I like to substitute fresh tomatoes for the sun-dried. *Serves six as a side dish.*

Coarse salt

- 1½ cups medium bulgur
- 1½ cups canned chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- ½ tsp. ground cumin
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 6 oz. feta, coarsely crumbled
- ½ cup finely sliced sun-dried tomatoes (if not oil-packed, rehydrate)
- 1 small cucumber, peeled, seeded, and chopped into small dice
- 3 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 3 Tbs. chopped fresh mint
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Juice from ½ lemon (about 2 Tbs.); more to taste
- 1 lemon, sliced into wedges

In a small pan, bring 3 cups salted water to a boil. Put the bulgur in a medium heatproof bowl and pour the boiling water over the bulgur. When the water is absorbed and the bulgur is *al dente* (after about 15 min.), drain the bulgur and let it rest for 10 to 20 min. Fluff it with a fork and combine it with the chickpeas in a large bowl. Add the cumin and 3 Tbs. of the olive oil and toss. Stir in the feta, sun-dried tomatoes, cucumber, parsley, and mint. Add salt and pepper to taste. Add the lemon juice to taste. Let sit for 15 min.; taste and add more salt or lemon juice, if needed. Drizzle with the remaining 1 Tbs. olive oil and serve at room temperature with the lemon wedges on the side.





Wheatberries

Consisting of whole kernels of the wheat plant, minus the hull, wheatberries have a nutty flavor and resilient texture that many people adore. Cooked wheatberries also add substance and texture to soups, stews, and even salads.

Chewy, hearty wheatberries pair wonderfully with rice in a stuffing that's great inside baked peppers, tomatoes, or roasted chicken.

Buying tips

Ranging from tan to reddish brown, wheatberries are either hard or soft. You'll most likely find hard wheatberries (in natural-foods stores and some specialty markets and supermarkets), but often they're not

labeled either way. The two forms are interchangeable in recipes, but soft wheatberries cook much faster, so be sure to start checking for doneness early.

Cooking basics

To intensify their nutty flavor, you can toast dry wheatberries in a skillet for about 5 minutes. Soak the grains (toasted or not) in water for a few hours or overnight to shorten their lengthy cooking time. To cook, use 1 part wheatberries to about 6 parts liquid. Bring to a boil and simmer until tender but still a bit chewy. Cooking time for soaked wheatberries ranges from 25 to 50 minutes; unsoaked, they'll need 50 to 90 minutes. They'll split and turn mushy if overcooked, so start testing early. Cooked and drained wheatberries will hold for several days in the refrigerator. They can also be frozen for a few months; to thaw, run hot tap water over them in a colander and drain very well.

RECIPE

Wheatberries with Fragrant Spices, Currants & Almonds

You can serve this dish like a pilaf as a side dish or as a vegetarian main dish. I use it to stuff poultry and vegetables such as baked red peppers and tomatoes. *Serves four to six as a side dish; yields 4 cups stuffing, enough for about 6 red peppers or 10 to 12 tomatoes; a 3-lb. chicken holds about 1½ cups stuffing.*

- ½ cup wheatberries, soaked for 4 hours or overnight**
- Salt**
- 2 Tbs. olive oil or unsalted butter**
- ½ medium onion, chopped into medium dice**
- 4 scallions (white and light green parts only), chopped**
- ¼ tsp. ground allspice**
- ¼ tsp. ground cinnamon; more to taste**
- ½ cup basmati or other long-grain white rice**
- ⅓ cup dried currants or coarsely chopped raisins**
- ¾ cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken or vegetable broth**
- 1½ oz. (⅓ cup) slivered almonds, toasted**
- 2 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**
- 1 Tbs. grated lemon zest**
- Freshly ground black pepper**

Drain the wheatberries. In a small saucepan, bring the wheatberries and 3 cups salted water to a boil. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer until tender but pleasantly chewy, 25 to 50 min. Drain well.

Meanwhile, heat the oil or butter in a small saucepan over medium low. Add the onion and scallions; cook until tender and translucent, about 7 min. Stir in the allspice, cinnamon, and rice, cook until the spices are fragrant, 1 to 2 min., and then add the currants or raisins, the broth, and salt to taste. Bring to a boil, turn the heat to low, cover, and simmer until the liquid is just absorbed and the rice is tender, 12 to 15 min.

In a bowl, combine the wheatberries, rice mixture, and almonds. Stir in the parsley and lemon zest and adjust the salt, pepper, and cinnamon to taste.





Farro

Farro is an ancient variety of wheat cultivated in Italy that has recently caught the attention of cooks in the United States. It has a nutty flavor and a firm, chewy texture that resembles barley more than wheat. Italians put farro in soups, salads, and stuffings. My family's favorite way to eat it is simple: heat $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups fresh corn kernels and 3 to 4 cups cooked farro in water or broth until the corn is *al dente* and the farro is hot. Drain; stir in butter and salt.

An Italian favorite comes to the U.S. Farro has a pleasingly firm, chewy texture; it's the perfect filler for a warming soup.

Buying tips

Don't confuse whole-grain farro with the cracked form, which looks like bulgur, has a very different texture, and cooks much faster. You can buy whole-grain farro in specialty food shops or by mail order (see Sources, p. 76).



Cooking basics

Many farro recipes say to soak it for 2 hours to shorten the cooking time, but I find it unnecessary. Simmer 1 part whole-grain farro in about 5 parts salted water until it's pleasantly toothy and chewy but no longer hard and then drain any excess water. Unsoaked, it cooks in 15 to 30 minutes. Cooked farro will keep in the refrigerator for five days; reheat it in broth or water.

RECIPE

Rustic Bean & Farro Soup

The farro can get soft if it sits in the soup overnight, so I cook it separately and add it only to the amount of soup I'm serving. *Serves six as a main dish; eight as a first course.*

3 Tbs. olive oil
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup chopped pancetta
1 medium onion, chopped
2 medium carrots, peeled and chopped
2 medium ribs celery, chopped
4 large cloves garlic, minced
2 tsp. chopped fresh sage, marjoram, or thyme, or a combination
 $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups dried chickpeas or cannellini beans (or a combination), picked over, soaked overnight, and drained (or $3\frac{1}{2}$ cups canned chickpeas, cannellini beans, or a combination)
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups canned diced tomatoes
8 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth or water
2 tsp. coarse salt; more to taste
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
 $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups uncooked whole-grain farro
Extra-virgin olive oil for garnish
Freshly grated *parmigiano reggiano* for garnish

Heat the olive oil in a soup pot set over medium heat. Add the pancetta and sauté until golden brown, about 5 min. Add the onion, carrots, celery, garlic, and herbs and sauté until the vegetables soften, about 5 min.

If using dried beans, add the soaked, drained beans to the soup pot, with the tomatoes, broth or water, and 2 tsp. salt, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat, cover, and simmer until the beans are tender, 1 to 2 hours. (If using canned beans, drain and rinse them, add the tomatoes, broth or water, and 2 tsp. salt to the soup pot and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat, add the beans, and simmer for about 20 min.) Season with salt and pepper. For a creamier soup, purée 1 cup of the bean mixture and stir it back into the pot.

In a saucepan, bring 6 cups salted water to a boil. Add the farro, reduce the heat, and simmer until it's just *al dente* and chewy, about 10 to 30 min. Drain, add it to the soup, and simmer for another 10 to 15 min. to let the flavors meld and to finish cooking. Stir to prevent scorching. Ladle into bowls and garnish with a swirl of olive oil, grated cheese, and pepper.

Joyce Goldstein, the former chef-owner of Square One in San Francisco, teaches and writes about cooking. ♦

Cook Lamb Slowly for Tender Texture

For big flavor and meltingly tender meat, start with an overlooked cut—lamb shoulder

BY BRIAN STREETER

When it comes to cooking lamb for dinner, shoulder probably isn't the cut you'd think of first. (You might say rack, leg, or rib chops, right?) But for me, inexpensive cuts like lamb shoulder are the unsung heroes of the butcher case. They're richer in flavor than other cuts, and the relaxed pace of braising or slow roasting that they require is just the way I like to cook on my days off work as a winery chef.

Try a shoulder roast or shoulder chops

The lamb shoulder cuts you're most likely to find at the supermarket or butcher are shoulder roast and shoulder chops.

♦ A *boneless lamb shoulder roast* weighs about three pounds and easily feeds six to eight. (You may need to call in advance to have the butcher bone the roast.) I like to fill shoulder roasts with a savory stuffing, like the one on p. 66.

♦ *Lamb shoulder chops* are sold as either blade chops or shoulder arm chops. Both are tasty, though I prefer shoulder blade chops because arm chops tend to curl up around the bone when I brown them before braising. Try to choose chops that aren't cut too thin—they should be about $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch thick.



High-heat cooking won't give these cuts of meat the time they need to soften, so stay away from grilling, broiling, or roasting at high temperatures. Except for an initial sear in a hot skillet or first blast of high heat during roasting, these cuts benefit from low heat and moist cooking over a long period of time, which allows the meat's connective tissue to become tender and release its rich flavor. That's one of the things I love best about cooking lamb shoulder—a long, slow cooking time that gives me an opportunity to build those layers of flavor.

Slow roasting and a savory sausage and spinach filling give gutsy flavor to a stuffed lamb shoulder roast.

(Recipes follow)

How to trim, stuff, and roll a lamb shoulder



Start trimming off large pockets of fat by making small swipes of the knife to ease the fat loose.



Remove thinner pieces by pulling toward you. Angle the knife as close to the meat as possible, cutting away from you.



Cut the lamb to an even thickness by butterflying thicker spots, if need be. Cut a sideways incision and open like a book.

Roast Lamb Shoulder Stuffed with Sausage & Spinach

This rustic roast is delicious with a full-bodied Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot. *Serves six.*

FOR THE STUFFING:

- 1 bunch spinach (about 10 oz.), stemmed and washed, excess water still clinging
- 2 links (4 oz. total) sweet Italian sausage, removed from the casings and crumbled
- 1½ cups fresh breadcrumbs
- ½ cup grated *pecorino romano* cheese
- 1 large egg

Brian Streeter loves the rich aromas that fill the kitchen as a stuffed lamb shoulder roasts.



FOR THE LAMB:

- 3- to 3½-lb. boneless lamb shoulder roast, trimmed as shown in the photos above
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 6 heads garlic, top half sliced off
- 8 sprigs fresh thyme

Heat the oven to 450°F.

Make the stuffing—In a large skillet over high heat, cook the wet spinach until completely wilted (there's no need to add oil to the pan as long as water droplets are clinging to the leaves). Transfer to a colander and run under cold water to cool; squeeze out the excess water and finely chop. In a large bowl, mix the spinach with the sausage, breadcrumbs, cheese, and egg. Set aside.

Stuff and roast the lamb—Season the inside of the lamb with salt and pepper. Spread on the stuffing and roll and tie it as shown in the photos above right.

Set the roast in a flameproof roasting pan or casserole dish, brush it with the olive oil, and season it with more salt and pepper. Roast for 30 min. and then lower the heat to 350°F. Rub the cut side of the garlic heads in the pan juices and arrange the garlic (cut side down) around the roast, along with the thyme sprigs. Cover the pan with foil and roast for 1 more hour.

Remove the foil, turn the garlic cut side up and roast uncovered until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the center of the stuffing registers 165°F, another 10 to 15 min. Transfer the roast to a cutting board, tent it with foil, and let rest for 5 to 10 min. Meanwhile, remove the garlic and thyme from the roasting pan; reserve the garlic and discard the thyme. Tilt the pan and spoon off any fat. To deglaze the pan, add ¼ cup water, set the pan over low heat, and simmer, scraping the browned bits off the bottom with a wooden spoon; add more water if needed. Cut the twine and slice the roast in ½-inch slices. Spoon the pan sauce over the slices and serve with the roasted garlic.



Spread the stuffing in an even layer, leaving a few inches uncovered at the end.



Starting with the bare edge away from you, roll up the roast.



Tie the roast in four or five places to secure a compact cylinder. Trim the extra string.

Braised Lamb Chops with Black Olives & Artichokes

Fresh artichokes taste great with lamb, but frozen hearts will do in a pinch: thaw them, pat them dry, and add them about half an hour after you've added the olives. *Serves two generously.*

4 lamb shoulder blade or arm chops, ¾ inch thick
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 Tbs. olive oil
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 tsp. chopped fresh rosemary
2 tsp. tomato paste
1 cup homemade or low-salt canned beef broth
½ cup dry white wine
Juice of 1 lemon
2 large artichokes
¼ cup niçoise or other good-quality black olives, pitted

Heat a heavy, straight-sided skillet over medium-high heat. Season both sides of the chops with salt and pepper. Add the olive oil to the heated pan and sear the chops on both sides until well browned, about 3 min. per side (work in batches if needed so you don't crowd the pan). Sprinkle the garlic and rosemary over the chops in the pan. Whisk the tomato paste into the beef broth and pour it over the lamb; add the wine. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to a slow simmer, cover, and simmer for 30 min.

Meanwhile, combine the lemon juice with cool water in a bowl. Snap off the dark-green outer leaves of each artichoke. Cut off all but 1 inch of the stem, as well as the top third of each artichoke. Trim the outside and bottom to remove the bases of the leaves and the tough outer part of the stem. Cut each in half; with a spoon, scoop out and discard the hairy choke and purple inner leaves. Cut each half into four wedges and put these in the acidulated water until ready to use.

After the lamb has simmered for 30 min., remove the artichokes from the water and stuff them between the chops in the pan. Sprinkle the olives over the chops.

Continue simmering over low heat, covered, until the chops are very tender and the artichokes are cooked through, 40 to 45 min. Transfer the chops, artichokes, and olives to a platter; tent with foil to keep warm. If the pan juices are greasy, tilt the pan and spoon off the fat. Put two chops on each plate and spoon the artichokes, olives, and pan juices over them.

Brian Streeter is the chef at Cakebread Cellars in Rutherford, California. ♦



A savory pan sauce tops tender lamb and artichokes.

Bread Puddings

sweet,

Classic and homey,
Bread & Butter
Pudding with Raisins
looks more dressed
up when baked in
individual ramekins.



rich, and light

BY LESLIE REVSIN

My first taste of bread pudding is lost in fuzzy history, but its sweet, homey spirit managed to make an indelible mark on my memory. This shouldn't be surprising—after all, bread pudding was never intended to be a striking “oh, mama!” of a dessert but just something delicious that a smart, frugal mom would have made for the family with what was around. And what was around couldn't have been more humble: good, stale bread saturated with butter, milk, eggs, and sugar and baked to a firm yet giving denseness.

I know some people who like their bread puddings to be bready and weighty; others go for lighter versions that are all about the custard. I'm not opposed to either extreme, but my preference usually falls somewhere in between. I aim for that happy medium where the bread gets wonderfully suffused with custard. This gives you a pudding that's rich and full-bodied but that doesn't drag you down.

The bread dictates the style

The bread you choose has a huge effect on the style of your pudding. An open-textured loaf with lots of holes makes a lighter pudding—those random holes become serendipitous little pockets of custard. If you choose a bread like ciabatta or pugliese, a country-style loaf, or a French baguette, which are airy but have good chew, your pudding will strike a satisfying balance between lightness and body.

In contrast, a loaf with a tight crumb makes a compact pudding with a dense texture (and although that may not

sound appealing at first, imagine it served in elegantly thin, overlapping slices on a plate and drizzled with whisky sauce). If I want a special party pudding that's not only rich but also seductively delicate, I choose a light, eggy, and buttery loaf like challah, brioche, or Portuguese sweet bread. Traditional homemade-style white bread makes an excellent pudding with medium body, as long as the bread has some character.

One type of bread I wouldn't waste my time and ingredients on is inferior factory white bread; like the bread itself, the pudding will be flaccid and gummy.

I've tried recipes in old cookbooks for puddings made from just crumbs, but I've yet to taste one that provides the sort of toothy satisfaction I'm looking for. Instead, I cut the bread into slices or cubes or rip it into smallish rough chunks. Be sure to cut the bread before it dries out completely; rock-hard bread is difficult to saw into.

Once the bread is dried, butter it well. If you're working with slices, spread one side with softened butter (or brush or drizzle on melted butter instead). If you're using cubes, toss them with melted butter or sauté them in butter until their edges toast to a golden color.

An eggy custard holds it together

The custard is what binds the bread together and creates the pudding's lusciousness. Milk, eggs, and sugar are its basic elements, but I like to use either heavy cream or sour cream (in addition to milk) for extra richness. The sour

To strike the perfect balance of bread and custard, start by picking the right loaf



For lighter bread puddings with pockets of rich custard, use airy loaves like ciabatta, pugliese, or focaccia.



For weightier bread puddings with a compact texture, choose bread with a tight crumb, such as home-style white bread or challah.

A moist bread pudding needs plenty of custard

Eggs, milk, and sugar are all it takes, but adding extra yolks and heavy cream delivers richer flavor.



The warm custard won't cover the bread, so be sure to douse the top layer as you pour.



Full saturation is the goal. Press occasionally to submerge the bread as it soaks; a 30-minute soak should do it.

cream also adds the barest hint of sourness, not surprisingly, which I really like when the pudding is sweetened with brown sugar.

But the key to a good custard is the eggs since it's the proteins in them that gel to create a moist, smooth, delicate solid. I like to add extra yolks to the mixture, turning a good custard into a silken one with even richer flavor.

Assembling bread pudding couldn't be easier. Just put the buttered bread in a buttered baking dish and pour the warm custard on top. Other flavorings, like fresh or dried fruit, can be layered in as well (see the sidebar on p. 73). I let the unbaked pudding sit for about half an hour, long enough to let the custard completely soak through the bread. The top layer of bread has a habit of floating above the custard instead of in it, so I help things along by pressing down on the bread a few times during the soak. When you're ready to bake, all the bread should be swollen and soft, which promises a nice, moist pudding.

As with most baked custards, bread pudding bakes in a hot water bath, which ensures even, slow cooking for a smooth, velvety result. For this, you'll need a roasting pan, or any pan that's larger than and at least as deep as the bread pudding pan itself. I get a jump-start on the water bath by filling the roasting pan one-quarter of the way with hot water and putting it in the heating oven as the pudding soaks. This way, when the pudding is ready to be baked, the hot water bath is ready to go. (When the pudding pan goes in, the water level should rise to about halfway up the sides; if it doesn't, add more from the tap.)

The pudding is done when the top starts to crust, brown, and puff and when a wooden skewer poked into the center comes out clean. Remove the pudding from the water bath and let it cool just long enough so it's still warm. You can dress it up with whisky sauce (see the recipe above right) or with your own favorite sauce. I like bread pudding best simply topped with unsweetened whipped cream as a cool, luxurious foil.

This sauce goes with almost any bread pudding, but I particularly love it with the chocolate bread pudding recipe below. Rum or brandy would work fine in place of the whisky.

Whisky Sauce

Yields 1 cup.

8 Tbs. unsalted butter, cut into pieces
½ cup packed dark brown sugar
¼ cup Scotch whisky or Bourbon;
more if you like
4 large egg yolks, lightly beaten,
at room temperature

In the top of a double boiler set over—but not touching—a pot of barely simmering water, combine the butter, brown sugar, and whisky. Whisk until the butter and sugar are melted and the mixture is smooth.

Add the yolks and continue whisking (or stirring with a wooden spoon) until the sauce is very thick and has some body, 7 to 10 min.; it will have the consistency of caramel sauce (an instant-read thermometer should register 160°F). If you want more whisky flavor, add more, 1 tsp. at a time, to taste. Serve hot or warm. This sauce thickens as it cools.

Whisky sauce is a great partner to dark chocolate.

To “marbleize” this chocolate bread pudding, chocolate custard gets drizzled over slices of challah.



Bittersweet Chocolate Marble Bread Pudding

I love the combination of dark chocolate custard, vanilla custard, and light, rich, challah bread in this pudding. If you can't find challah, use brioche or Portuguese bread. *Serves eight to ten.*

5 Tbs. unsalted butter, softened
1 lb. challah bread, sliced ½ inch thick and dried overnight
2½ cups milk
1½ cups heavy cream
¾ cup sugar, plus 2½ Tbs. for sprinkling
Pinch salt
6 oz. bittersweet chocolate, chopped
5 large eggs plus 3 yolks, at room temperature
2 tsp. vanilla extract
2 Tbs. brandy, Grand Marnier, or other liqueur (optional)

Butter a 9x13-inch shallow baking dish (with handles, if possible) with 2 tsp. of the butter. Spread the rest of the butter on one side of each slice of the dried bread.

Pour the milk and cream into a medium saucepan and stir in ¾ cup of the sugar and the salt. Heat on medium high, stirring once or twice, until the sugar is dissolved and the mixture is hot. Meanwhile, melt the chocolate in a double boiler set over—but not touching—hot water. In a large bowl, whisk the eggs and yolks. When the chocolate is melted, stir briefly until smooth and keep it warm.

When the milk is ready, stir in the vanilla and brandy, Grand Marnier, or other liqueur, if using. Gradually whisk about ¾ cup of the hot milk into the eggs and then whisk in the rest. Measure out 1 cup of the custard, add it to the melted chocolate all at once, and whisk until smooth and glossy (keep the chocolate on the double boiler; it will tighten at first and then get smooth).

Arrange half the bread slices in the buttered pan, buttered side up and overlapping slightly if necessary. Drizzle the bread with half the chocolate custard. Repeat this layering once more. (If you're

using a smaller baking pan, you'll need to make three layers of bread and chocolate.) Pour the remaining vanilla custard over the bread and press the slices into the custard; the chocolate will smear. Lay plastic wrap directly on the pudding and let sit, pressing on the plastic frequently to submerge the top layer, until the bread is thoroughly soaked, 25 to 30 min.

While the bread soaks, adjust an oven rack to the center position. Set a roasting pan, large enough to comfortably hold the pudding, on the rack. Pour in hot water to come one-quarter of the way up the sides. Heat the oven to 350°F.

Remove the plastic and sprinkle on the remaining 2½ Tbs. sugar. Set the pudding in the roasting pan; if the hot water doesn't come halfway up the sides, add more until it does. Bake until the pudding is slightly puffy and crusty and a wooden skewer inserted in the center comes out clean, 40 to 45 min. Remove the pudding from the water bath. Serve warm.

(More recipes follow)

Browned Apple Bread Pudding

Sautéed apples, brown butter, and brown sugar add extra flavor to this pudding.
Serves eight to ten.

6 to 7 Tbs. unsalted butter; plus 2 tsp. softened butter for the baking pan
2 lb. Empire, Macoun, or Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored, and thinly sliced
1 lb. loaf homemade-style sliced white bread (about 12 large slices), crusts trimmed, dried overnight
2 cups milk
½ cup heavy cream
¾ cup packed light brown sugar; plus ¼ cup or more for the topping
Pinch salt

4 large eggs plus 4 yolks, at room temperature

1 tsp. vanilla extract
1 cup sour cream, at room temperature

Butter a 9x13-inch shallow baking dish (with handles, if possible) with the 2 tsp. softened butter.

Set a large skillet (preferably nonstick) over high heat with 1 Tbs. of the butter. When the butter froths, add just enough apple slices to cook in one layer; sauté until browned on both sides, about 5 min. Transfer to a large plate and sauté the remaining apple slices the same way, adding 1 Tbs. more butter for each batch. The second (and third) batch will brown more quickly, so you may need to lower

the heat. Reduce the heat to low and melt 4 Tbs. butter in the empty pan, cooking it and swirling the pan until the butter turns light brown, about 1 min. Take it off the heat immediately.

Lay one-third of the bread in the buttered baking pan, scatter about one-third of the sautéed apples and drizzle on one-third (about 1 Tbs.) of the brown butter. Make a second layer of bread, apples, and brown butter, and finish with a layer of bread and brown butter; reserve the remaining apples.

Pour the milk and cream into a medium saucepan. Stir in the ¾ cup brown sugar and salt. Heat over medium high, stirring once or twice, until the sugar dissolves and the milk is hot; don't worry if it looks like it's curdling.

In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the eggs, yolks, and vanilla. Gradually pour about 1 cup of the hot milk mixture into the eggs, whisking constantly, and then whisk in the rest. Gradually whisk in the sour cream to combine completely.

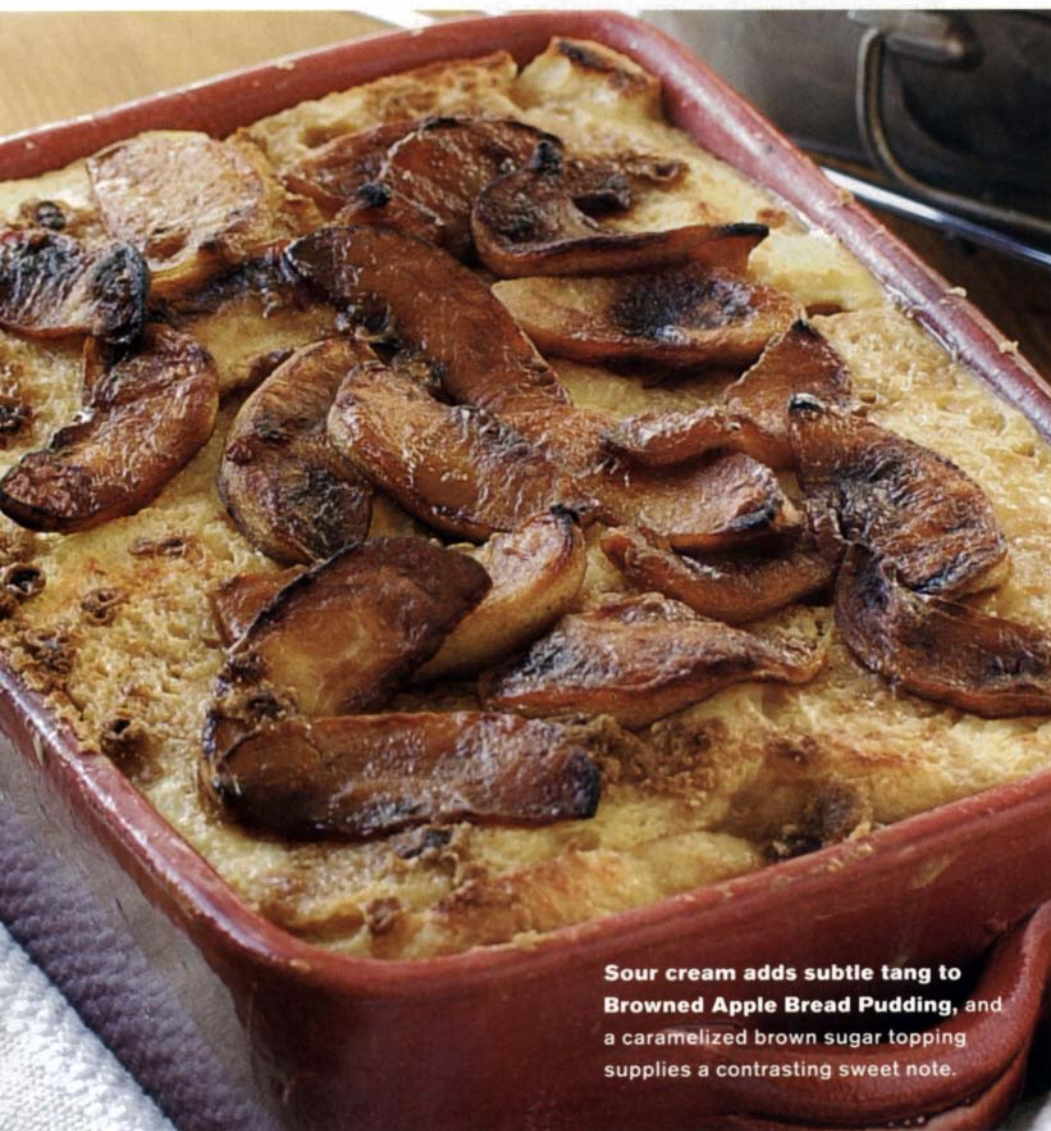
Pour the custard over the bread, pressing the bread down to fully moisten it. Lay plastic wrap on the surface of the pudding and let it sit, pressing on the plastic frequently to submerge the bread, until the bread is thoroughly soaked, 30 to 40 min.

While the bread soaks, adjust an oven rack to the center position. Set a roasting pan, large enough to comfortably hold the pudding, on the rack. Pour in hot water to come one-quarter of the way up the sides. Heat the oven to 350°F.

Remove the plastic wrap. Arrange the reserved apples on top and sprinkle the top evenly with ¼ cup brown sugar (or more, if you like). Set the pudding in the roasting pan; if the hot water doesn't reach halfway up the sides, add more until it does. Bake until a wooden skewer inserted in the center comes out clean, 40 to 50 min. Remove from the water bath and turn on the broiler. Broil the pudding (the top should be about about 3 inches from the heat source) until it's lightly caramelized, 2 to 4 min. Serve warm.

Bread & Butter Pudding with Raisins

The flavor of real vanilla bean, rich cream, raisins, nutmeg, and cinnamon are the heart of the custard in this pudding. For a more elegant presentation, you can make this in individual ramekins. Use eight



Sour cream adds subtle tang to Browned Apple Bread Pudding, and a caramelized brown sugar topping supplies a contrasting sweet note.

medium (5-oz.) ramekins and lay plastic wrap over each one to submerge the bread during the soaking. *Serves eight to ten.*

2 Tbs. unsalted butter; plus 2 tsp. softened butter for baking pan

1 lb. focaccia or other open-textured, rustic-style bread, cut into ¾-inch cubes and dried overnight

3 cups milk

1 cup heavy cream

½ cup plus 2 Tbs. sugar

Pinch salt

⅛ tsp. ground cinnamon

⅛ tsp. grated nutmeg

1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise, or 2½ tsp. vanilla extract

6 large eggs plus 2 yolks, at room temperature

FOR THE TOPPING:

⅓ cup raisins

1½ Tbs. sugar

Scant ½ tsp. ground cinnamon

Scant ½ tsp. grated nutmeg

1 Tbs. unsalted butter, cut in small pieces

Butter a 9x13-inch shallow baking dish (with handles, if possible) with the 2 tsp. softened butter.

In a large skillet, melt 1 Tbs. of the butter. Add half the bread cubes and sauté on medium to medium-high heat until the corners are barely golden, about 2 min. Dump the cubes into the buttered baking pan. Repeat with the remaining 1 Tbs. butter and the rest of the bread.

Pour the milk and cream into a medium saucepan. Stir in the ½ cup plus 2 Tbs. sugar, the salt, cinnamon, nutmeg, and vanilla bean, if using. Heat over medium high, stirring once or twice until the sugar dissolves and the milk is hot. Remove from the heat. If using vanilla extract, stir it in now. If using a vanilla bean, cover the saucepan and let steep for 10 min.

In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the eggs and yolks. When the milk is ready, remove the vanilla bean, if using, scrape out the seeds, and stir them into the milk. Slowly pour about ½ cup of the hot milk mixture into the eggs, whisking constantly. Gradually whisk in another ½ cup, and then the remaining more quickly. With a rubber spatula, scrape any vanilla seeds from the saucepan into the custard.

Pour the custard over the bread, pushing down the cubes to moisten them all. Lay plastic wrap directly on the pudding and let sit, pressing on the plastic fre-



Sliced apples are an excellent bread pudding add-in; just sauté them in butter first.

Delicious variations for your pudding

Here are a few bread pudding variations that you can apply to the recipes on pp. 71-73, or that can form the basis of your own recipe.

◆ Scatter dried fruit into the buttered pan or toss with bread cubes before adding the custard. Apricots and prunes work well together. If the fruit is dry or chewy, first plump it in simmering water for a few minutes; drain and dry on paper towels. Cut

larger fruit into bite-size pieces.

◆ Tuck fresh fruit between slices of buttered bread. Try pitted, halved cherries, sliced pears, Italian plums, or sautéed apple slices.

◆ Infuse the custard with a strip of lemon or orange zest. Remove the zest before pouring the custard over the bread.

◆ Replace the nutmeg and cinnamon in a recipe with a lesser

amount of mace or ground ginger, or combine them with a pinch of cloves for a spiced pudding.

◆ Sprinkle cinnamon sugar on the buttered bread as you layer the slices in the pan.

◆ Toss small pieces of crystallized ginger with the bread in the pan.

◆ Flavor the custard with 1 or 2 tablespoons of liqueur, such as Amaretto, kirsch, or rum.

quently to submerge the top layer, until the bread is thoroughly soaked, 30 to 35 min. While the bread soaks, adjust an oven rack to the center position. Set a roasting pan, large enough to comfortably hold the pudding, on the rack. Pour in hot water to come one-quarter of the way up the sides. Heat the oven to 350°F.

Remove the plastic wrap from the pudding. To make the topping, sprinkle on the raisins and press them partly into the pudding. In a small bowl, mix the sugar

with the cinnamon and nutmeg and sprinkle this evenly over the top. Dot the pudding with 1 Tbs. butter.

Set the pudding in the roasting pan; if the hot water doesn't come halfway up the sides, add more until it does. Bake until a wooden skewer inserted in the center comes out clean, 40 to 45 min. Remove from the water bath. Serve warm.

Leslie Revsin is a chef and cookbook author. She lives in Bronxville, New York. ◆

Does egg size matter?

Fresh eggs are classified in sizes ranging from peewee to jumbo, yet most markets sell only the three intermediate sizes: medium, large, and extra-large, with large being the most popular. Large eggs are also the standard used by cookbook authors and food writers (and this magazine), so most recipes call for them. If you happen to have a different size egg than what your recipe calls for, it's good to know when and how you can substitute.

The good news is that differences in egg sizes are surprisingly small (see "What's in an egg?" below), so unless you're baking, casual substitutions are easy. It's up to you to determine how much the success of your recipe depends on the proportion of eggs before you worry about substitutions. If you're making a frittata, scrambling eggs, or using an egg to make a coating for a cutlet, just use what you have on hand. If you're baking—especially



cakes, custards, and soufflés—then you'll want to blend your medium or extra-large eggs and measure their volume to come up with the appropriate substitute for large eggs (see the table below left).

When size doesn't matter

If your recipe doesn't depend on the right proportions of eggs to succeed—you're making scrambled eggs, a frittata, a strata, or using a beaten egg to coat cutlets or bind fritters—use whatever size egg you have on hand. Simply substitute one extra-large egg or one medium egg for one large egg. If that recipe (say, the frittata) happens to call for large quantities of eggs, you can use the substitution chart (below right) for a little better accuracy.

When size does matter

If your recipe depends on the proportion of eggs to succeed (you're baking a cake, making custard, etc.), and you don't have the large eggs the recipe calls for, you'll want to measure the volume of your substitute eggs (you'll need to blend them first), and use the amount equivalent to what the large eggs would have yielded:

- 1 large egg, beaten = 3¼ tablespoons
- 2 large eggs, beaten = 6½ tablespoons (¼ cup plus 2½ tablespoons)
- 3 large eggs, beaten = 9¾ tablespoons (½ cup plus 1½ tablespoons)
- 4 large eggs, beaten = 12¾ tablespoons (¾ cup plus 1 teaspoon)
- 5 large eggs, beaten = 1 cup

What's in an egg?

Eggs are classified by weight by the dozen. Because of this, there will be slight variations in the weights of eggs in every carton. A dozen extra-large eggs weighs 27 ounces (about 2¼ ounces each on average), a dozen large eggs weighs 24 ounces (about 2 ounces each), and a dozen medium eggs weighs 21 ounces (about 1¾ ounces each).



Extra-large

Yields:
4 tablespoons
(2⅔ tablespoons white &
1⅓ tablespoons yolk)



Large

Yields:
3¼ tablespoons
(2¼ tablespoons white &
1 rounded tablespoon yolk)



Medium

Yields:
3 tablespoons
(2 tablespoons white &
1 tablespoon yolk)

If your recipe calls for four or more eggs...

In non-baking recipes, if you're substituting only one, two, or three extra-large or medium eggs for large eggs, simply make a one-to-one direct substitution. Beyond that, use these equivalents:

- ♦ in place of 4 large eggs use 4 extra-large or 5 medium
- ♦ in place of 5 large eggs use 4 extra-large or 6 medium
- ♦ in place of 6 large eggs use 5 extra-large or 7 medium

Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*. ♦

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AT THE MARKET

Melissa's (800/588-0151; www.melissas.com) sells both radishes and litchis seasonally.

TECHNIQUE CLASS

Many supermarkets have drastically improved their stock of authentic risotto rice. If your market doesn't carry it, try **La Cucina Rustica** (800/796-0116; www.cybercucina.com) which sells carnaroli (2.2 pounds, \$7.50), arborio (2.2 pounds, \$5.50), and vialone nano (1 pound, \$4.70).



CUISINES

Most Asian specialty stores, and some grocery stores, sell miso, mirin, and sake. You can also find these products

online at **Katagiri Food Catalog**

(212/755-3566; www.katagiri.com) which carries over a dozen

types of miso, most of them \$2 to \$5 per pound. Another mail-order source for Japanese products is

Uwajimaya (800/889-1928; www.uwajimaya.com).

South River Miso in Massachusetts (413/369-4057; www.southrivermiso.com) makes excellent traditional-style misos.



KITCHEN DETAIL

Rubbermaid (888/895-2110; www.rubbermaid.com) sells many types of plastic garbage and recycling bins.

SPRING MENU

You may want to use an offset spatula to frost the orange cake featured in the spring menu.

Schroeder's Bakeries, Inc.

(www.schroedersbakery.com; 800/850-7763) sells five different sizes of icing spatulas, ranging from \$3 to \$5. Schroeder's also carries cake rounds, which help with transferring and transporting cakes. Sizes range from 6- to 16-inch corrugated rounds with prices for packs of six around \$5.

POPOVERS

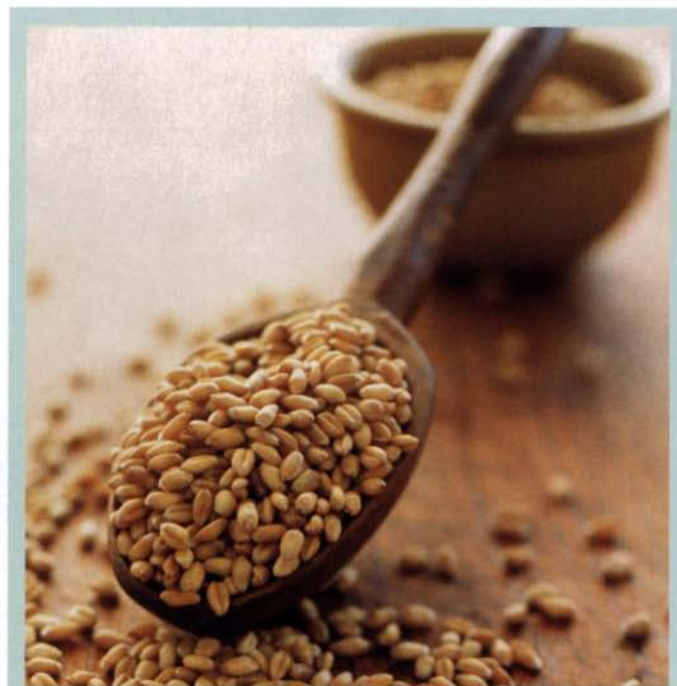
Popover pans give popovers their greatest "pop." To buy a pan, try **Kitchen Emporium** (888/858-7920; www.kitchenemporium.com), which sells Chicago Metallic 6-cup popover pans for \$16.95.

BREAD PUDDING

Ramekins give bread pudding an elegant presentation for individual portions. **Kitchen Conservatory** (866/862-2433; www.kitchenconservatory.com) carries ten different sizes of ramekins. The 6-ounce version is \$6.50.

ARTISAN FOODS

To buy a Johnston County Ham, call the Smithfield Ham Shop (800/543-4267) or try Dean & DeLuca (877/826-9246; www.deandeluca.com).



Grains

A.G. Ferrari (877/878-2783; www.agferrari.com) carries two varieties of this hard-to-find Italian grain. Pearled farro from the Garfagnana region is large and cooks quickly; a 1.1-pound bag is \$4.50. Farro from the Abruzzo region of Italy is sturdier and cooks a little slower; a 2.2-pound bag is \$6.50. If you can't find wheatberries in your local supermarket, look up **The Grain & Salt Society** (800/867-7258; www.celtic-seasalt.com). A 5-pound bag of hard winter wheatberries is \$5.65; a 5-pound bag of soft winter wheatberries sells for \$5.85.

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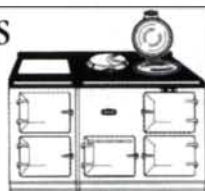
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Recipe (analysis per serving)	* total	Calories from fat	Protein (g)	Carb (g)	total	Fats (g) sat mono poly			Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
At the Market - page 18												
Radish & Parsley Salad w/Lemon	100	80	1	4	9	1	7	1	0	210	1	per serving
Technique Class - pages 22-24												
Risotto alla Milanese	510	180	13	63	20	12	6	1	50	490	1	per first course serving
Spring Menu - pages 36-41												
Asparagus & Gingered Grapefruit Salad	350	110	6	59	13	2	5	4	0	1340	7	per serving
Ginger-Lime Glaze	40	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	per tablespoon
Asian Vinaigrette	40	30	0	1	3.5	0.5	1.5	1.0	0	400	0	per tablespoon
Herb & Lemon Roasted Salmon w/Potatoes	850	560	41	34	62	9	39	11	95	490	4	per serving
Orange Layer Cake	800	290	6	125	32	16	10	3	165	610	1	per serving, based on 10
Popovers - pages 42-44												
Popovers	160	70	6	15	8	4	3	1	100	260	0	per serving, based on 10
Creamy Pastas - pages 45-49												
Ziti w/Mushrooms, Pancetta & Peas	620	250	17	72	28	12	12	2	60	180	5	per serving, based on 3
Angel Hair w/Garlic & Clam Cream Sauce	640	230	35	66	25	14	7	2	130	610	4	per serving, based on 3
Penne w/Tomato Vodka Cream Sauce	590	250	14	62	27	12	12	2	60	240	4	per serving, based on 3
Spaghetti w/Shrimp in Curry Cream Sauce	670	250	36	66	28	11	11	3	225	410	6	per serving, based on 3
Fusilli w/Sausage & Sun-Dried Tomatoes	810	380	40	61	42	19	18	3	115	790	3	per serving, based on 3
Rigatoni Normandy	650	220	31	62	25	14	7	1	120	260	4	per serving, based on 3
Cauliflower - pages 50-53												
Gratin of Sautéed Cauliflower	330	190	9	34	21	3	14	4	0	430	8	per serving
Roasted Cauliflower Salad	250	210	3	9	23	3	17	2	0	360	4	per serving
Creamy Roasted Garlic Soup	440	230	12	43	25	4	18	3	0	360	9	per serving
Pasta w/Roasted Cauliflower	370	90	15	56	10	1	7	2	10	580	8	per serving
Banoffee - pages 54-57												
Banoffee	420	230	6	44	26	16	7	1	105	160	1	per serving
Tortilla Soup - pages 58-59												
Chicken & Tortilla Soup	670	320	34	61	35	8	15	9	75	1140	15	per serving
Grains - pages 60-64												
Barley Risotto w/Mushrooms & Gremolata	390	110	12	63	12	5	5	1	15	690	13	per serving, based on 6
Bulgur & Chickpea Salad	320	140	11	38	16	6	8	1	25	620	8	per serving, based on 6
Wheatberries w/Fragrant Spices	180	60	5	29	7	1	4	1	0	80	5	per ½ cup serving
Rustic Bean & Farro Soup	330	110	16	43	12	2	7	2	10	820	7	per serving, based on 8
Lamb Shoulder - pages 65-67												
Roast Lamb Shoulder Stuffed w/Sausage	660	300	59	29	34	12	17	3	210	590	3	per serving
Braised Lamb Chops w/Black Olives	620	310	46	24	34	8	20	3	135	1120	10	per serving, based on 2
Bread Puddings - pages 68-73												
Bittersweet Chocolate Marble Bread Pudding	560	300	12	53	33	18	9	2	265	330	2	per serving, based on 10
Browned Apple Bread Pudding	460	220	10	56	24	13	7	2	225	330	4	per serving, based on 10
Bread & Butter Pudding w/Raisins	440	230	11	43	25	12	7	3	220	350	2	per serving, based on 10
Whisky Sauce	100	60	1	7	7	4	2	0	70	5	0	per tablespoon
Quick & Delicious - page 82B												
Quick Clam Chowder w/Bacon	310	90	22	34	10	3	4	1	55	880	5	per serving
Sautéed Shrimp w/Orange, Basil & Pernod	240	100	24	10	11	6	3	1	195	450	0	per serving
Broiled Asparagus & Orange Slices	100	60	3	8	7	1	5	1	0	125	3	per serving, based on 4
Arugula, Feta & Dill Frittata	310	210	19	4	24	8	11	2	500	580	0	per serving
Bow-Tie Primavera	430	110	17	64	12	4	5	1	20	480	7	per serving, based on 6
Seared Scallops w/Pineapple-Ginger Sauce	270	100	29	12	11	3	6	1	65	400	0	per serving
Broiled Chicken Thighs w/Coriander Rub	330	120	46	5	14	3	4	5	190	1320	1	per serving, based on 3
Sautéed Pineapple w/Pecan Rum Sauce	380	190	3	42	21	8	7	4	35	15	3	per serving

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a

recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a

specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

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BY AMY ALBERT



Hand-salted and hand-rubbed, one ham at a time. Linwood Raynor, working along with Gary Williams and Mario Mauricio, massages a dry rub into hams fresh from the slaughterhouse.

Country Ham, the Old-Fashioned Way



To check that the ham is fully cured, Rufus Brown inserts a probe and then smells it. "The scent I'm looking for is hard to describe, but it's rich, aromatic, and smells like great ham."



This ham is salty, but it also has a sweet, buttery edge that's unique to slow curing and aging.

You recreate the seasons when you cure country ham," says Rufus Brown, proprietor of Johnston County Hams in Smithfield, North Carolina. Country ham harkens back to a time before refrigeration, when meat was rubbed with salt, hung to cure, and, in the process, underwent the changes in temperature typical of any agricultural year, with the ham finally ready to eat at Christmas. In the interests of production, nine months are compressed into three, as Rufus and his small team of processors move the hams from one temperature-controlled room to another to replicate climate changes. But other than time compression, the method remains the same. Rufus learned the craft from his father, who was a master curer, and he insists on keeping things hands-on, just as his father did.

BY PAM ANDERSON



Broiled Chicken Thighs with Coriander Rub

Serves four.

8 boneless, skinless chicken thighs, trimmed of excess fat

Vegetable oil for coating
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 Tbs. ground coriander

2 Tbs. fish sauce

2 tsp. light brown sugar

¼ lime

¼ cup thinly sliced scallion greens

Adjust the oven rack to the position closest to the broiler and set the broiler on high. Coat both sides of each thigh with just enough oil to get the seasonings to stick. Sprinkle each side with salt, pepper, and a portion of the coriander, rubbing the sea-

sonings into the meat. Mix the fish sauce and sugar in a small bowl; set aside.

Lay the thighs flat on a broiler pan and broil until they're opaque on top, 3 to 4 min. Remove the thighs from the oven. Without turning them, brush them with the fish sauce mixture and return them to the oven. Continue to broil until the thighs are spotty brown and cooked through, another 4 to 5 min. Transfer to a serving plate; pour the pan juices over the chicken. Squeeze lime juice over the chicken and sprinkle with the scallions. White rice is a good accompaniment.



Bow-Tie Primavera

Serves four to six.

Coarse salt

1 lb. dried bow-tie pasta (farfalle)

4 oz. asparagus, woody stem ends snapped off; tips and remaining stalk cut into 1-inch lengths

1 cup (4 to 5 oz.) frozen baby green peas

10 oz. spinach, stemmed and washed

2 cloves garlic, minced

2 Tbs. olive oil

1 can (14½ oz.) diced tomatoes, with their liquid

¼ cup heavy cream

½ cup freshly grated Parmesan (about 1½ oz.); more for serving

½ tsp. dried red chile flakes
Freshly ground black pepper

While preparing the ingredients, bring 4 qt. water to a boil over medium-high heat in a large pot; add 2 Tbs. salt and the pasta to the boiling water. Cook the pasta, stirring frequently, until it starts to soften, about 7 min., and then add the asparagus.

When the pasta and the asparagus are tender, add the peas and spinach. Stir and simmer until the spinach is wilted, about 30 seconds. Reserve ½ cup of the pasta water and then drain the pasta and vegetables.

Meanwhile, heat the garlic and oil in a 10-inch skillet over medium heat until the garlic starts to sizzle and turn golden. Add the tomatoes; cook until thick enough to coat the pasta, 4 to 5 min. Add the cream; continue cooking until the sauce is once again thick enough to coat the pasta, 2 to 3 min.

After draining the pasta and vegetables, return them to the pot and add the creamy tomato sauce, the reserved pasta cooking liquid if necessary, the Parmesan, and chile flakes; toss to coat. Taste and adjust the seasonings. Serve, passing the additional cheese separately.



Sautéed Shrimp with Orange, Basil & Pernod

Serves four.

1 bottle (8 oz.) clam juice
¼ cup thawed orange juice concentrate
1 lb. medium shrimp
3 Tbs. unsalted butter
4 cloves garlic, peeled and lightly crushed
Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 Tbs. Pernod or dry vermouth
¼ cup thinly sliced basil leaves

Bring the clam juice and orange juice to a boil over high heat in a 12-inch skillet until the mixture is reduced by half, about 5 min. Meanwhile, peel and devein the shrimp. With a spatula, scrape the reduced sauce into a small bowl and set aside.

Without rinsing the pan, return it to high heat and add the butter and garlic; cook until the garlic starts to sizzle, about 15 seconds.

Add the shrimp and sauté until it just starts to lose its raw color, 2 to 3 min., sprinkling lightly with salt and pepper to taste. The pan will start to darken as the sugar from the sauce cooks; don't worry, this will just add more flavor to the finished sauce. Add the reduced sauce and bring to a simmer. Stir in the Pernod or vermouth and the basil. Remove and discard the garlic cloves, adjust the seasonings, and serve. Angel hair pasta or rice makes a nice accompaniment.

Tip

♦ To save time, look for "easy-peel" shrimp, which has already been deveined.



Sautéed Pineapple with Pecan Rum Sauce

Serves four.

¼ cup instant flour (Wondra brand)
8 rings peeled, cored pineapple bought prepared at a grocery store, juice reserved (or 8 slices from a 20-oz. can of pineapple in unsweetened juice, juice reserved)
¼ cup dark rum
¼ cup packed brown sugar
¼ cup toasted chopped pecans, or other toasted nuts
2 Tbs. unsalted butter
1 Tbs. vegetable oil
¼ cup heavy cream
Vanilla ice cream for serving

Measure the flour into a pie plate. In a Pyrex measuring cup, combine ¼ cup of the pineapple juice with the rum, sugar, and nuts; set aside.

Pat the pineapple dry. One at a time, lightly dredge the pineapple rings in the flour and put them on a wire rack. Heat the butter and oil over medium heat in a 12-inch skillet. When the

butter begins to darken slightly, increase the heat to medium high and add the pineapple rings to the skillet. Sauté until golden brown on one side, 2 to 3 min.; turn the pineapple over and sauté until golden brown on the other side, 2 to 3 min. longer. Transfer the pineapple to four dessert plates. Carefully add the rum mixture to the empty skillet; simmer and reduce until syrupy, 1 to 2 min. Remove from the heat and stir in the cream. Spoon a portion of the sauce over each plate and serve immediately with the ice cream.

Tip

♦ You can sauté the pineapple without the Wondra flour, though it won't brown as evenly or have a crisp crust.



Broiled Asparagus & Orange Slices with Olive Oil & Shallots

Serves four as a side dish or three as a first course.

- 1 lb. asparagus, woody stem ends snapped off and discarded**
- 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 shallot, thinly sliced and separated into rings**
- 4 very thin orange slices, cut into quarters**
- ¼ tsp. finely grated orange zest**

Adjust an oven rack as close to the broiling element as possible. Heat the broiler on high. In a bowl, toss the asparagus spears with the oil to coat and season with salt and pepper. Arrange the shallot slices in a thin layer on one side of a rimmed baking sheet or jellyroll pan. Put the asparagus in a single layer on top of them. Toss the orange slices with the leftover oil, salt, and pepper in the bowl you used for the asparagus. Arrange the slices in a single layer

alongside the asparagus. Broil until the asparagus and the oranges just start to char, 5 to 8 min. Remove from the oven and sprinkle the asparagus with the orange zest. Arrange the asparagus, shallots, and oranges on a serving dish. Serve hot, warm, or at room temperature.

Tips

- ◆ If serving as a first course, you may want to drizzle the cooked asparagus with a little more olive oil.
- ◆ Eight thin lemon slices can be substituted for the orange slices. The cooked orange and lemon slices—skin and all—are edible.



Seared Scallops with Pineapple-Ginger Sauce

Serves four.

- 6 Tbs. homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth**
- ¼ cup thawed pineapple juice concentrate**
- ½ tsp. grated fresh ginger**
- 1½ lb. “dry” sea scallops (see Tips), patted dry**
- 2 Tbs. olive oil**
- Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 Tbs. unsalted butter**

Combine the chicken broth, pineapple juice concentrate, and ginger in a small bowl. Set the scallops on a plate and drizzle with the oil; turn to coat. Sprinkle both sides with salt and pepper. About 2 min. before searing the scallops, set a heavy-based 12-inch nonstick skillet over high heat and turn on the exhaust fan.

When the pan is very hot, add the scallops. Cook over high heat until they develop an even, rich brown crust, 2 to 3 min. per side. Remove from the heat and transfer the scallops to a plate.

Return the empty skillet to the heat and add the pine-

apple juice mixture; boil until the liquid reduces by about half. Tilting the skillet so that the reduced liquid is at one side of the pan, whisk in the butter. Spoon a portion of the sauce over the scallops and serve immediately.

Tips

- ◆ You can substitute orange juice concentrate for the pineapple juice in this recipe and use salmon fillets instead of the scallops.
- ◆ Be sure to ask your fishmonger for “dry” scallops, ones that have not been treated with an STP (sodium tripolyphosphate) solution. “Wet” scallops (ones treated with this solution) won’t brown as well when you sauté them.



Arugula, Feta & Dill Frittata

Serves four.

9 large eggs
3 Tbs. freshly grated
Parmesan
3 oz. feta cheese, crumbled
(about ⅔ cup)
2 Tbs. minced fresh dill
Coarse salt and freshly
ground black pepper
2 Tbs. olive oil
1 large clove garlic, minced
4 cups packed arugula
(about 4 oz.), stemmed,
washed, and dried

Adjust an oven rack to the upper-middle position and heat the oven to 400°F.

In a large bowl, lightly beat the eggs. Stir the Parmesan, feta, dill, and a light sprinkling of salt and pepper into the beaten eggs.

Heat the oil and the garlic in a 10-inch ovenproof non-stick skillet over medium-high heat. When the garlic sizzles and starts to turn golden, add the arugula. Cook the arugula, stirring constantly, until wilted, 1 to 2 min. Season lightly with salt and pepper. Reduce the heat to low, shaking the pan to distribute the arugula evenly. Add the egg mixture and cook until the eggs start to set around the edges, about 1 min.

Transfer the pan to the oven and bake until the eggs are puffed and set, 10 to 12 min. Slide or invert the frittata onto a large plate, cut into four wedges and serve.



Quick Clam Chowder with Bacon, Tomatoes & Bell Peppers

Serves four.

2 oz. bacon (1 to 3 slices
depending on thickness),
cut into ½-inch pieces
1 medium onion, diced
½ large red bell pepper,
diced
3 Tbs. all-purpose flour
4 cans (6½ oz. each)
minced clams, clams and
juice separated (about
1½ cups minced clams
and 2¼ cups juice)
1 bottle (8 oz.) clam juice
1 can (14½ oz.) diced
tomatoes, with their liquid
¾ lb. boiling potatoes
(about 3 small potatoes),
cut into medium dice
¼ tsp. dried thyme
2 Tbs. minced fresh flat-
leaf parsley
Coarse salt and freshly
ground black pepper

In a Dutch oven or a large saucepan, fry the bacon over medium heat until the fat ren-

ders and the bacon crisps, about 7 min. With a slotted spoon, transfer the bacon to a small bowl; set aside.

Add the onion and bell pepper to the bacon drippings; sauté until softened, about 5 min. Add the flour and stir until lightly colored, about 1 min. Gradually whisk in the clam juice (from the cans and the bottle) and ½ cup water and then add the tomatoes, potatoes, and thyme.

Simmer until the potatoes are tender, about 10 min. Add the clams and parsley, season to taste with salt and pepper; and bring to a simmer. Remove the pot from the heat, ladle the chowder into bowls, sprinkle with the reserved bacon, and serve.